Diana of Kara-Kara

EDGAR WALLACE

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BY

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CHAPTER I

"SHE is an orphan," said Mr. Collings emotionally.

Orphans were Mr. Collings' weakness.

In ordinary intercourse as between lawyer and client, he was a stern, reserved man with a cold passion for compromise. Litigants entered his office charged with bubbling joy that their enemies had delivered themselves into their hands; they came talking five figure damages and the stark ruin of men and corporations who and which had offended them. They slunk out again into the glare of an Australian sun, their cases demolished, their spirits broken, their futures clouded. Mr. Collings did not believe in litigation. He believed that things could be arranged.

If it was possible for a murdered man to walk into Mr. Collings' office and say: "I've got an excellent case against Binks: he has just shot me

dead. Do you think I can get damages?" Mr. Collings would reply: "I very much doubt it. There is a great deal to be said for Binks. And aren't you in rather an awkward position yourself? You are carrying about a bullet which undoubtedly is the property of Binks. You never know what point of view a jury will take. You had better let me try to settle this."

But in the matter of orphans Mr. Collings was slightly unbalanced. He was strictly brought up by parents who compelled him to read books on Sunday that were entirely devoted to orphans and good organ-grinders and little girls who quoted extensively from precious books and died surrounded by weeping negroes. In such literature the villains of the piece were young scoundrels who surreptitiously threw away their crusts and only ate the crumbly part of bread; desperadoes who kicked dogs and threw large flies into spiders' webs and watched the spider at his fell work with glee.

"She is an orphan," said Mr. Collings again, and blew his nose loudly.

"She has been an orphan for ten years," said Mr. William Cathcart cynically.

Mr. Collings was stout, bald, given to afternoon

naps; Mr. Cathcart was thin, narrow-faced, not so bald, and never slept at all, so far as anybody knew. He hated orphans. They stood for questions of *cestui que use,* problems of *cy-pres,* perplexities of *donatio mortis causa* and the Guardianship of Infants Act. He never saw an orphan without his hand going instinctively to his hip pocket.

"And the most irregular orphan I have ever met," continued Mr. William Cathcart remorselessly. "An infant in law with a bank balance of a hundred thousand! I refuse to drop a tear—positively!"

Mr. Collings wiped his eyes.

"She *is* an orphan," he insisted. "Mrs. Tetherby gave her the money during her lifetime: there is nothing irregular in that. If I gave an—an orphan"—he swallowed hard—"a penny, a pound—a thousand—is that a breach of the law, an impropriety, even though it is practised *de die in diem?*"

Mr. Cathcart considered.

"You might in certain circumstances be acting *de sont tort,*" he said.

Mr. Collings pondered this; found the term almost inapplicable, but not so much so that he could

be offensive in a gentlemanly way. Wisely he returned to lamb.

"Mrs. Tetherby was inert. Stout women are often inert——"

"Lazy," suggested the dyspeptic Cathcart.

"She was fond of Diana. Few aunts are fond of nieces. Her will proves that. She left everything——"

"There was nothing to leave," interrupted Mr. William Cathcart with sour satisfaction. How that man hated orphans! "There was nothing to leave because in her lifetime she gave Diana full control of her money."

"She was inert," murmured Mr. Collings. "She loved this orphan child——"

"If there was one woman in the world who ought never to have been allowed——"

"Never ought have been," corrected Mr. Collings gently.

"—to have charge of a girl of Diana Ford's temperament, it is or was Mrs. Tetherby. A child of sixteen who has a raging love affair with a student——"

"A theological student," insisted Mr. Collings. "Don't forget that. A young woman may well feel that she could give her heart to a theological

student when a medical student would have revolted all that was most sensitive in her nature."

"A theological student makes it worse."

"At least Mrs. Tetherby consulted us on that matter." Mr. Collings was a shade reproachful. "Inert or energetic, she consulted us."

"She consulted us to discover whether she would be liable to trial for murder if she waylaid and shot Mr. Dempsi. She said that she had set a dog on to him, but he was incapable of taking a hint. Those were her words."

"Dempsi is dead," said Mr. Collings in a hushed voice. "I spoke to Diana on the subject only eight months ago—when her dear aunt died. I asked her if the wound had left a scar. She said she scarcely remembered a scratch, and that she often amused herself in the evenings by trying to draw him from memory."

"A heartless little devil," said Mr. Cathcart.

"A child—youth has no memory, not even for its stomach aches," said Mr. Collings oracularly.

"Did you discuss those too?" sneered his partner.

Mr. Collings raised his eyebrows. Such a man as he is hopeless in the face of sheer vulgarity.

"An orphan . . ." he began.

The clerk at the door spoke in the strained way of managing clerks.

"Miss Diana Ford, sir," he said.

The legal house of Collings & Cathcart exchanged glances.

"Show the young lady in." The door closed. "Be gentle with her, William."

Mr. Cathcart writhed.

"Will she be gentle with me?" he asked bitterly. "Will you guarantee that she will be reasonably polite to me—and back your guarantee with real money?"

There came through the door a peach tree, blossoming in the spring of the year; summer dawn on riverside meadows with the dew winking from a thousand gossamers. The froth of hawthorn in an English country lane; a crystal brook whispering between slim larches. Miss Diana Ford.

During the war Mr. Cathcart had held a commission in the Army Service Corps (Home Service) and had acquired the inventory habit. He saw:

Girl:	Slim, medium size.	One.
Eyes:	Grey-blue; large, more or less innocent.	Two.

Mouth: Red, Bow-shaped, largish. One.
Nose: Straight, in perfect shape. One.
Hair: Slightly golden, bobbed. One complete head.

Diana was as unrecognisable from the inventory as the average man from the description on his passport. She had the atmosphere of spring and dawn. Her colouring belonged to such season and time, having a pink of its own and a whiteness which looked pink when compared with white. She moved with such supple grace that Mr. Cathcart suspected an entire absence of corsets—he was a married man.

She came impulsively to Mr. Collings and kissed him. Mr. William Cathcart closed his eyes, so did not meet the smirk of satisfaction which his partner loosened for his benefit.

"Good morning, Uncle. Good morning, Uncle Cathcart."

"'Mornin'," said Mr. Cathcart, hostile to the last.

"'Mornin'!" she boomed in imitation. "And I've come feeling awfully nice toward you! I called you 'Uncle'!"

"I heard you," glowered the newly elected rel-

ative. "It would be much better, Miss Ford, if we proceeded on business lines——"

"You can proceed on tram lines if that pleases you," she sighed, taking off her hat and tossing it on to the nearest deed-box. "Oh, Uncle Collings, I'm *sick!*"

Mr. Cathcart half rose in his alarm.

"Sick of Australia, sick of the station, sick of the people, sick of everything. I'm going home."

"Home!" gasped Mr. Collings. "But, my dear little Diana. If by 'home' you mean England and not—er——"

"Heaven," suggested Mr. Cathcart.

"I mean England, of course I mean England. I am going to stay with my cousin, Gordon Selsbury."

Mr. Collings scratched his nose.

"An elderly person, of course?"

"I don't know." She shrugged her indifference.

"Married, er——?"

"I suppose so. If he's nice. All the nice men are married—present company excepted."

Mr. Collings was a bachelor and could afford to laugh very heartily. Mr. Cathcart, on the other hand, *was* married and was not even amused.

"You have cabled and written, of course: there is no objection to your going to—er—Mr. Selsbury's?"

"None whatever." She was overridingly brisk. "He will be delighted to have me."

"Twenty!" said Mr. Cathcart and shook his head. "An infant in law! I really think we must know more about Mr. Selsbury and his condition before—eh, Collings?"

Mr. Collings looked appealingly at the girl; she had never seemed more or looked less orphaned than at that moment.

"It would be wise, perhaps—?" he no more than suggested.

When Diana smiled her eyes wrinkled up and you saw both rows of her small white teeth.

"I have taken my cabin: a lovely one. With a bathroom and sitting-room. The walls are panelled in blue brocade silk and there is a cute little brass bedstead in the middle—so that you can fall out either side."

Mr. William Cathcart felt it was the moment to bring down his foot.

"I am afraid I cannot consent to your going," he said quietly.

"Why?" Up went her chin.

"Yes, why?" demanded Mr. Collings. He was anxious to know.

"Because," said Mr. Cathcart, "because, my dear young lady, you are an infant in the eyes of the wise old law of this country; because Mr. Collings and I stand *in loco parentis* to you. Now I am old enough to be your father——"

"And grandfather," she said calmly. "But does that matter? There was a lad of sixty trying to find opportunities for squeezing my hand all the way down in the train from Bendigo. Age means nothing if your heart is young."

"Exactly!" said Mr. Collings, whose heart was very young.

"The long and the short of it is that you can't go," said Mr. William Cathcart defiantly. "I do not wish to apply for an order of the court——"

"One moment, little friend of the poor," said Diana. She threw several priceless law books and a pile of affidavits from a chair and sat down. "A few moments ago—correct me if I am wrong: I seldom am—you produced your hoary Mr. Loco Parentis to crush me to the earth. Meet Colonel Locus Standi!"

"Eh?" said William, dithered.

"My knowledge of legal formula is slight," said Diana gravely. "I have lived a pure and a sheltered life amidst the rolling grass lands of Kara-Kara, but ignorant orphan though I am . . ."

Mr. Collings sighed.

" . . . I understand that before a lawyer applies to the courts he must have a client. For no lawyer, except perhaps a lawyer who has been crossed in love and is not quite sane, goes to law without a client."

Mr. William Cathcart shrugged his shoulders.

"You must make your own bed," he said.

"The court can't even make me do that," she replied.

Mr. Cathcart saw her walking across to him and took up his pen hastily.

"Uncle Cathcart," she said in a low voice, "I did so hope and pray that we should part friends! Every night when I kneel by my bed and say 'Please, God, give Uncle Cathcart a sense of humour and make him a nice man,' I have expected the miracle to happen."

Uncle Cathcart wriggled.

"Have your own way," he said loudly. "I can't put an old head on young shoulders. Those who live longest will see most."

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating," she added gently. "You forgot that one."

At luncheon, Mr. Collings tapped the ash of his cigar into the coffee saucer.

"What is this fellow like—this Selsbury?"

"He's wonderful!" she said dreamily. "He rowed six in the University eight—I'm simply crazy about him."

The startled Mr. Collings gazed at her in fascinated horror.

"Is he crazy about you?" he gasped.

Diana smiled. She was adjusting her nose with the aid of a mirror concealed in the flap of her handbag.

"He will be," she said softly.

CHAPTER II

NEITHER by nature crazy, nor by inclination eccentric, Mr. Gordon Selsbury had at moments serious but comfortable doubts as to whether he was not a little abnormal; whether he was not, in fine, one of those rare and gifted mortals to whom was given Vision beyond the ordinary. His environment was the commonplace City of London; his occupation a shrieking incongruity for a spiritual man—he was an insurance broker. And a prosperous insurance broker.

Sometimes he sat before the silver fire grate of his sitting-room, amazed at the contradictory evidence of his own genius. Here (said he, thinking impartially) was a man with a Conscious Soul, beside whom other men were clods, vegetables, animals of the field, slaves to their material demands. Lifted above the world and its peculiarly grimy interests, he was a man whose spiritual head rose above fog and was one with the snow-capped mountains and the blue skies. And yet—here was

the truly astonishing thing—he could grapple most practically with these materialists and could tear from the clenched and frenzied paws large quantities of soiled and greasy money. . . .

"No, Trenter, I shall be out to-morrow afternoon. Will you please tell Mr. Robert that I will see him at my office. Thank you, Trenter."

Trenter inclined his head respectfully and went back to the telephone.

"No, sir, Mr. Selsbury will not be at home to-morrow."

Bobbie Selsbury was annoyed.

"Will you tell him that he promised to play in a foursome with me, tell him—ask him to come to the telephone."

Gordon got up from his tapestried armchair with an expressionless face. Before the servants he revealed nothing in the least degree emotive.

"Yes, yes, I know!" wearily. "But I had a prior engagement. You must get somebody else. Old Mendlesohn . . . what's the matter with him? Rubbish, my dear fellow. . . . At any rate, you must get somebody—I'm tremendously busy to-morrow. . . . I don't feel like discussing my business on the telephone. Good-bye."

He paced his dignified way to his den. Gor-

don Selsbury once rowed six in the Varsity boat —there were crossed oars above his fireplace, though he thought the display in bad taste. He had once been a fresher whose chief joy in life had been to steal policemen's helmets and ride a bicycle down forbidden pathways, and to sprint from proctors. It seemed difficult to believe. He was tall and good-looking in the Apollo Belvedere manner. Fair, with a forehead which was large and thoughtful, he baffled instant analysis by carrying through life two inches of sidewhisker on either cheek. Men seeing him first thought he wrote music or played a 'cello. Women on introduction guessed him as a dancer of amazing agility, or possibly a film artist.

"Trenter . . ."

Trenter waited, his head attentively thrust forward, a simulation of intense interest on his sharp features. He continued to wait, even as Gordon continued to frown at the fireplace.

"Trenter . . ."

"Yes, sir?"

Slowly Mr. Selsbury turned his head until his eyes met Trenter's.

"I saw you kissing the parlourmaid this morning. You are a married man, I believe?"

Trenter blinked apprehensively. He was indeed married.

"I do not wish that sort of thing to happen again," said Gordon, mildly scandalised. "You are a married man with responsibilities which cannot be ignored or set on one side. Eleanor, as I understand her name to be, is a young girl, possibly inflammable, certainly impressionable. To cloud a young girl's life by awakening in her heart a passion which you cannot return is most reprehensible. Even I have been rocked by the current which the stone you cast has set into motion. My shaving water was late this morning. This must not occur again."

"No, sir," said Trenter.

News comes instantly to the servants' hall in any event. Now, telepathy lagged behind Trenter's spoken word.

Eleanor, tall, svelte, pallid of face, black eyebrows and eyes that flashed, interrupted the operation of a lip-stick to listen. She was tremulously indignant.

"Because he's a St. Andrew, does he think that we haven't any human feelings? The poor cold-blooded fish! I'll let him know that I won't be talked about and my name took away—taken

away, I mean—by a prying, sneaking, rubber-soled spy. He is too!"

"Who's this St. Andrew?" Trenter was suspicious of all saints, being by marriage a Primitive Baptist.

"He's the man that women tempted and he wouldn't," said Eleanor, prepared to drop the illustration. But Trenter was of another mind.

"Who's been tempting him?" he asked, darkling eyed.

"Nobody: not if it's me you mean. I'd like to see him put his arm round *my* waist! He'd never forget it!"

"He wouldn't forget himself anyway," said Trenter, relieved.

She tossed her head sceptically.

"Oh, I don't know!" she said, and nodded to a warm, large woman in the gingham and apron of her profession. "Ask cook!"

Trenter was dazed.

"Good God!—not you, cook?" he asked in a whisper.

Happily Mrs. Magglesark was not a quick thinker.

"Yes; I saw him too," she said, and Eleanor, in terror that the telling of the story should go

elsewhere, trod on the opening of the cook's narrative.

"Me and cook—that is to say cook and I—were on top of a 'bus last Sunday——"

"In Knightsbridge." Thus the cook claimed her equal share of the copyright.

"We were laughing and talking when cook said 'Look, Nelly—there's the boss.' "

"I said 'If that isn't his nibs!' " amended Mrs. Magglesark.

"And there he was!" said Eleanor. "With a girl, very tall and dressed in black, and he was holding her hand!"

"In the street?" incredulously.

"In the car: from the top of a 'bus you can look down into cars, if they're open. Many a sight I've seen!"

"Was she pretty?" asked Trenter, man-like.

Eleanor's lips pursed.

"Well, I suppose some people would call her pretty. Did you think she was pretty, cook?"

Mrs. Magglesark, having reached the age when she regarded all young people as passable, thought she was pretty.

"Holding her hand!" Trenter was very thoughtful. "It wasn't Mrs. van Oynne?"

"Who is she?"

"She's been here twice to tea. An American lady, rather well-dressed. Heloise! That's her name. And a good-looker. She usually wears black and paradise feathers."

"*She* wore paradise feathers!" said cook and Eleanor together.

Trenter nodded.

"That's her," he said, "but there's nothing in it. She's a highbrow. Reads books and all that. Last time she was here, she and him discussed the Ego Soul. The little bits I heard I couldn't make head or tail of."

Eleanor was impressed.

"Funny for him to be discussing eggs," she said.

It was not funny for Gordon Selsbury to discuss anything. With Heloise van Oynne there seemed to be no subject, from kidney beans to metaphysics, that he could not examine profitably. It is true that he did most of the talking, but her rapt gaze rectified deficiencies of speech.

Gordon sat with her that afternoon in the tea-room of the Coburg Hotel, and they were comparatively alone.

"There is something I have wanted to say to

you ever since I met you, Heloise," he said softly. "A month! It almost seems incredible! If our theories are substantial it is incredible. We met before in the Temple of Atlantis, where the bearded priests chanted the day through. And you were a great lady and I was a humble gladiator. That the gladiatorial games and even the factions of the circus have a more remote antiquity than Rome, I am certain. Who knows but that the last remnants of dying Atlantis were not the first peoples of Etruscan civilisation . . . ?"

Her fine eyes agreed with that theory. They said as plainly as though the words were spoken: "How brilliant of you to associate Etruria with the mythical civilisation of Atlantis!"

On the other hand, her eyes did not say many things that she thought.

"What is so fine about friendship," Gordon was going on, "is that we have lifted common interest above the sordid range of philanderism."

"How's that?"

Her head was bent forward eagerly, enquiringly. Trenter had the same trick, only he looked pained.

"I mean"—Gordon Selsbury flicked a crumb of cake daintily from his knee—"we have never tar-

nished the bright surface of our friendship with that weakness which is so glibly styled 'love.' "

"Oh!" Heloise van Oynne sat back in her basket chair. "That's so," she said, and if there was a sense of immense satisfaction in her tone, even one attuned to her spiritual wavelength would not have observed the circumstance.

"The perfect sympathy, the perfect understanding, the dovetailing of mind into mind, the oneness of a mutual soul—these transcend all sentient impressions, whatever be the label they bear."

She smiled slowly and with infinite sweetness and comradeship. Heloise invariably smiled at Gordon that way when she wasn't quite sure what he was talking about. Though, as to souls——

"The soul is certainly the finest thing we have around," she said, in deep thought. "That's where we've got most people skinned—I should say, at a disadvantage, you and I, Gordon. One doesn't like to bare one's heart; one shrinks instinctively even from self-revelation."

She sighed as one who had got through an exercise of considerable difficulty. Then, observing by certain signs that he had only, so to speak, removed the lid of his introspections and that the

real contents of his mind would shortly spill, to be gathered up and replaced by her none too sure hands, she interjected hastily:

"You were telling me, Gordon, about a cousin of yours in Australia—she must certainly be interesting, and I'm just mad to hear about your relations. I like you, Gordon—a lot. There's nothing about you that doesn't fascinate me."

She laid a gloved hand on his knee. No other woman could lay a hand, gloved or ungloved, on Gordon Selsbury's knee without his calling for the police. But Heloise . . . he laid his hand gently on hers.

"Diana? Well, really, I know nothing about her except that she had that tremendous affair with a fellow called Dempsi. I told you that. She's very well off, I believe. I've taken a little notice of her—sent her a few books and a word or two of advice. I often think that a man's advice is ever so much more acceptable to a young girl than a woman's. When were we talking about her? Oh, of course, I remember! It was when we had that tremendous talk on the growth of the Ego. . . ."

"Is she fair or dark?" Heloise nimbly blocked the road to metaphysics.

"I really don't know. I had a letter from my aunt—her aunt also—just before the poor creature died. She said that Diana had forgotten Dempsi and wondered where she could get his photograph—the man is dead. Has it ever occurred to you, Heloise, how absurd are such terms as life and de——"

"Diana!" mused Heloise, aloud. "Poor little Australian girl. I should like to meet her, Gordon."

Gordon shook his head, smiling gently.

"I cannot imagine anything less likely," he said, "than your meeting her."

CHAPTER III

CHEYNEL GARDENS is one of those very select thoroughfares that no cab-driver has ever found without the assistance of a local guide. Taximen have "heard of it," dimly remember having dropped a fare there at some time or other; but where it is, only the police and the postmen know. Often people who live in Cheynel Gardens have only the haziest idea whether they are in Mayfair or Marylebone.

Gordon occupied a corner house that had a garden, probably the garden after which the thoroughfare was named, for there was no other. If a garden can be so called that consists of a twelve by ten paved courtyard occupied by two large bushes in tubs.

It was the last house on the left as you turned in from Brook Street, a handsome, sober pile of red brick and yellow sandstone, with a big study to which stained-glass windows gave the appearance of a well-furnished chapel.

His study was indeed a holy place, for none

entered without invitation. It had two doors, one of thick oak, one of deadening baize, so that no sound might disturb Gordon's close and careful scrutiny of *The Economist,* which, with the *Insurance Review,* formed his light reading. By day he perused *The Times,* by night he read heavy studies in sociology, or, if he were tired, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*—Nietzsche being one of his favourite authors.

He descended from the cab that brought him home, gave the driver a ten per cent. tip worked out to the nearest penny, and erring on his own side, and walked slowly up the steps. The door opened instantly. It was part of the daily ritual. Trenter took his hat, his walking-stick and his gloves, and Gordon said:

"No letters?"

If Trenter had said no, the ritual would have been interrupted.

"Yes, sir, and——"

No need to say more. Gordon was staring at four immense trunks that almost completely covered the floor space of the hall. Three of them were conspicuously labelled "Not wanted on voyage." The fourth had a big red "Cabin" pasted on its side.

"What—on—earth—are—these?" asked Gordon breathlessly.

"The young lady arrived this afternoon, sir." Trenter was all a-twitter.

"The young lady arrived—which young lady, may I ask?"

"Miss Ford, sir."

Gordon's forehead wrinkled. He had heard the name in some connection. Ford . . . Ford? It was familiar.

"No, sir—Miss Diana Ford from Australia."

The cousin! Mr. Selsbury inclined his head graciously. The instincts of hospitality were not entirely atrophied, and the Selsburys were a race of courtly men.

"Will you tell Miss Ford I am returned and will be glad to see her in The Study?"

Trenter's face twitched.

"She's in The Study, sir," he almost pleaded. "I told her that nobody ever went when you were away and that I kept it locked."

Gordon was taken aback. It is disconcerting to a host to find his hospitality anticipated and taken as a right.

"Indeed!" he said, and smiled. "Miss Ford

couldn't be expected to understand our ways, Trenter. I will see her."

He knocked at the door and a voice bade him enter.

"I am delighted to meet you, Cousin Diana," he said, and looked round to discover how she might be met.

Then from his favourite chair a white hand appeared.

"Come in, Gordon. . . . I'm sure it's Gordon."

She jumped up and round to face him. She had taken off her shoes for greater comfort, and in her silk-stockinged feet looked very small. He thought she was pretty, just as he would have thought that a kitten was pretty. How very amusing.

"Well, young lady," he said with paternal good-humour, "so here you are! I never expected to see you. Have you had a good voyage——?"

"Are you married?" She asked the question rather tensely.

"No, I'm not married. I'm a confirmed old bachelor."

"Ah!" She sighed happily. "I was awfully scared of *that* complication—you haven't kissed me."

Gordon was not aware that he had not kissed her, any more than he was aware that he had not hit her on the head with the book he was carrying. The Selsburys were a courtly race. He stooped and struck her gently with his lips.

"Sit down, my dear—you will have tea, of course? I am truly sorry that I kept you waiting. Where are you staying?"

She flashed one look at him.

"Here," she said.

For a second he could not comprehend.

"I mean, what hotel—where are you—er—sleeping to-night?"

"Here," said Diana.

In moments of crisis Gordon never lost his head. He once stood on the deck of a sinking cross-Channel steamer discussing the atomic theory with a Cambridge don. He had twice heard burglars in the house, and had often been called upon without notice at public meetings to propose the health of the chairman.

"You mean that you are coming to stay with me—for a little while? I would be delighted, but unfortunately this is a bachelor establishment. There are no women in the house except the domestic staff."

He spoke kindly; his argument was logical, his attitude correct in every detail.

"You want a woman about the house; it was very nearly time I came," she said, as unflurried as Gordon himself.

He stifled his sigh. The position was embarrassing—other men would have been thrown off their feet and either lost their tempers or behaved in some way hurtfully.

"I shall be delighted to have you here—for a few days," he smiled. "So run along and telephone to your chaperone and ask her to bring her trunks here——"

Diana pulled on her shoes, unconcerned.

"I've been admiring your oars," she said. "You rowed six, didn't you—and won! How splendid!"

"Yes, yes—er—yes." Gordon was not proud of his bygone athleticism. "Or shall I telephone?"

"To whom?" innocently.

"To your chaperone . . . the lady with whom you are travelling . . ."

"Don't be silly."

He stiffened; went limp again: turned a shade paler.

"I travelled alone—as much alone as one can be with a hundred and fifty saloon passengers who played deck games and enjoyed them. An intellectual woman can have no possible community of interest with people who enthuse over bucket quoits."

A chair was within reach of his hand and he sat down. Men like Gordon Selsbury seldom lose grip of a situation, however awkward it may be. The sheer weight of their wisdom and their personality has a tendency to roll flat obstacles of the most tremendous nature.

"Now I'm going to be a father and an uncle and a wise old cousin to you," he said, good nature rigidly and obstinately imprinted in his smile. "You're a young girl and somebody has got to tell you that you cannot stay alone—er—as the guest of a bachelor."

She stood, her hands behind her, not the ghost of amusement in her face, unmoved and immovable.

"And I've got to tell you, Gordon Selsbury, that I not only can, but I'm going to stay here! I am not responsible for your being a bachelor. You ought to be married. It is unnatural to live in a big house like this by yourself. I have

come to stay and, possibly, keep house for you. You must let me have a list of the dishes you like for breakfast. I like grape fruit and hominy with a small crisp slice of bacon. At the same time, Gordon, I am not averse to devilled kidneys *à la chef*—do you like waffles? I'm crazy about them! We had a Japanese cook who made them to perfection. Another wonderful breakfast dish is tomatoes chiffre . . ."

"Diana," he said gravely, "you are distressing me. Of course you can't *possibly* stay here! My dear child, I have to consider your good name; in after years you will realise what a dreadful thing you have proposed. Now, my dear, I'm going to 'phone Laridge's Hotel and ask them to reserve a nice room for you."

He half rose; her hands dropped to his shoulders and she pushed him down. It was surprising how strong she was.

"Let us have no scandal," said Diana firmly. "There is only one way to get me out of this house and that is for you to send for a policeman. And a single policeman could do very little. I have an automatic in my dressing-bag . . . I shall not hesitate to shoot."

He gazed at her in horror. She returned the

gaze without reproach, without doubt. She had the Will to Stay. He recognised a variation of the Nietzsche principle.

"There is only one thing left for me to do, Diana," he said. His gravity was so profound that he intoned his speech; it became a Gregorian chant in the minor key. "I must go out from my house and leave you here. I myself must take a room in a near hotel."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," she said. "If you do I shall put advertisements in all the papers:

"Missing from his home since Friday, Mr. Gordon Selsbury. Tall, fair, fresh complexion, rather good-looking."

Gordon licked dry lips. Life was drab and sordid, but nothing in life was quite so vulgar and hateful as the popular press. The only time in his life that he had ever experienced a nightmare, the vision had taken a particularly hideous shape. He dreamt that he had been locked up for smothering a chorus girl, and was ordered by the judge to write his impressions of the murder in a Sunday newspaper.

"You will perhaps think better of this in a few

days," he said huskily. "I feel sure that, when you realise what you are doing——"

She sat down at his beautifully tidy writing-table, took up a pen, and snatched from his stationery rack a sheet of notepaper.

"Now tell me what you like for breakfast," she said. "Smoked haddock . . . salmon steak . . . fish is good for the brain. Do you mind if I call you Gord?"

CHAPTER IV

One day Diana came back from a conscientious tour of the stores and found a thin and middle-aged lady sitting in the drawing-room. She greeted Diana with a deferential smile. She was such a middle-aged lady as might have stepped from the pages of a late Victorian novel, and Diana regarded her steadily, for she wore no hat, had the skimpy beginnings of a purple wool jumper on her knees, and in her hands two knitting needles that seemed to be operating of their own volition all the time she talked.

"Good afternoon! You're Miss Ford, aren't you, my dear? I'm Miss Staffle, and I do hope we are going to be good friends!"

"I hope so," said Diana. "We'll be better friends when I understand. Are you a guest of ours?"

Click-flash-flicker went the needles. Diana looked in awe. She was the only woman in the world who had never knitted a jumper.

"Well . . . yes. Mr. Selsbury thought you

would be rather lonely. It doesn't do for us girls to be too much alone. We brood."

"I'm brooding at this minute." Diana was very incisive in business hours. "Do I understand that you have been engaged as a chaperone?"

"Companion," murmured Miss Staffle.

"That makes it easier," Diana opened her pocket-book. "Your salary is——?"

Miss Staffle murmured the amount.

"Here is two months' pay," said Diana. "I have decided not to engage a companion."

She rang the bell; the needles became stationary.

"Eleanor," to the svelte parlourmaid, "Miss Staffle is leaving before tea. Will you see that her boxes are brought down, and tell Trenter to have a nice clean taxi waiting?"

"But, my dear"—Miss Staffle's voice was slightly acidulated—"Mr. Selsbury engaged me, and I am afraid . . ."

"Mr. Selsbury doesn't want a companion," said Diana. "Now, my angel, are you going to give me trouble, or are you going to be a sweet little cherub and fly?"

Gordon came home prepared to face a storm

and ready to present a rocky face either to the waves of her wrath or the drizzle of her tears. He found her trying a new record on a brand-new gramophone, her feet moving lightly to the magical rhythm of "I Ain't Nobody's Darling." He resented the gramophone, but had other matters of greater moment to discuss. There was no sign of the excellent Miss Staffle.

"Anybody been?" he asked carelessly.

She stopped whistling.

"Nobody except an elderly lady who made the curious mistake of thinking I wanted a companion."

"Where is she?" asked Gordon, his heart sinking.

"I didn't trouble to take her address," said Diana. "Why—did you want her?"

"You sent her away?"

Diana nodded.

"Yes; her industry was appalling." And then, as a thought occurred: "Was the jumper for *you?*"

"You sent a—er—um—person I engaged away from my house?" sternly. "Really, Diana! This is a little too much! Let's have this out, my dear."

Diana changed the record.

"Tea will be served in ten minutes," she said. "And Gordon, my dear, your shoes are muddy. Run up and change them."

Revolt flew red signals on his cheeks.

"I will do nothing of the kind!" he said sharply. "I will not be ordered about in my own house. Diana, you have gone too far! This intolerable situation must end here and now."

He brought his hand slapping down on the back of the easy chair. He was determined.

"Either you or I leave this house to-night," he said. "I have had enough! Already the servants are talking. I saw a particularly sinister smile on Trenter's face when you came down to breakfast in your negligee this morning. I have a position, a reputation, a name in the City of London—I must guard my interests against the thoughtless, selfish folly of reckless adolescence!"

"What a name to call a lady!" she said reproachfully.

"I will not temporise; I will not allow a very serious situation to be turned into a jest. Either you leave Cheynel Gardens or I."

She thought a moment, then walked out of the

room. Gordon heard her at the telephone in the hall and smiled. A little firmness was all that was required.

"Is that the *Morning Telegram?* This is Miss Diana Ford speaking. Will you send a reporter to 61 Cheynel Gardens——"

In two seconds he was in the hall and had covered the transmitter with a frantic hand.

"What are you going to do?" he asked frenziedly.

She shrugged a shoulder.

"Life without you is insupportable, Gordon," she said brokenly. "You are the only relation I have in the world, and if you turn me out what is there left but the river?"

"You're mad," he wailed.

"The coroner will take that charitable view, I hope—don't interrupt me, Gordon. They want to speak to me."

By sheer force he lifted her away from the instrument and took the receiver in his own hand.

"Don't bother to send anybody . . . she is quite well . . . alive. I mean, there's no suicide . . ."

Out of breath, he strode back to The Study.

"Your conduct is abominable! You are shameless! I can well understand why your wretched Dempsi ran away, preferring to die in the bush than be any longer associated with such an infernal little termagant!"

The Selsburys were a courtly people, but there was a limit to their patience. He was savage, cruel, and knew he was behaving unpardonably before the words were out of his mouth.

"I'm sorry," he muttered.

Her face was set, a mask that showed nothing of her thoughts.

"I'm extremely sorry. I shouldn't have said that—please forgive me."

Still she did not speak. Her eyes were tragic in their steadfast, unwinking gaze. He stole quietly from the room, and then she spoke her thoughts aloud.

"How absurd not to have the telephone connected with the study! I'll write to the Post Office this very night."

A very silent dinner. Gordon was going out and was resplendent in his raiment.

"I am taking a friend to a theatre to-night," he said.

"I haven't seen a show for years," she sighed.

"This would not interest you. It is a Russian play dealing with social unrest."

She sighed again.

"I love Russian plays. All the characters die so nicely and you know where you are. In a musical comedy you can never be sure who anybody is."

Gordon shuddered.

"This is not a play for a young girl," he said gently.

She was unconvinced.

"If you very much wanted me to come, I could dress in five minutes," she suggested. "I hardly know what I shall do with myself to-night."

"Think out to-morrow's breakfast," he said bitterly.

Alone, she gave her mind alternately to serious thought and the new gramophone. She did think of Dempsi sometimes, and a little uneasily. Not that she had loved that strange progeny of Michael Dempsi and Marie Stezzaganni. Dempsi came into her life as an earthquake intrudes upon the domesticity of a Californian farmer. He shifted the angle of things and had been a great disturbance. She never really re-

membered Dempsi, except that he was very slight and very wiry and very voluble. She remembered that he had thrown himself at her feet, had threatened to shoot her, had told her he adored her and was ready to forsake his career in the church. Finally, on a hot February morning (she remembered that the roses were thick in the big garden) he had flung his worldly possessions at her feet, taken an intense and tearful farewell, and had dashed madly into the bush, never to return.

In point of fact, the nearest bush country was a hundred miles away, but he had said that he was going to the bush "to end a life already prolonged beyond the limits of human endurance and find forgetfulness in oblivion," and he had probably kept his word. So far as the "bush" part of the contract was concerned. She did not mourn him. If she wondered at all, it was as to the circumstances in which he would reappear and claim some eight thousand pounds neatly tied in one package that it might be the more effectively and dramatically thrown at her feet, and which in truth missed her feet by a wide margin and struck the station cat, who, being newly maternal, flew at Dempsi and accelerated his wild flight.

She did not tell her aunt about the eight thousand; Mrs. Tetherby being, as she had been described, "inert," had an objection to fuss of any kind. More than this, she possessed one curious weakness—a horror of debt. The knowledge that she was under monetary obligation kept her awake. An overlooked garage account once reduced her to a state of nervous prostration. Other people's money she would not touch, and, on an occasion when, having paid her shearers, she was requested by the men to keep the money from Saturday to Monday, she paced the verandah for two nights, a shot gun under her arm.

It was largely due to this weakness that all money affairs were in Diana's hands from the age of fifteen. Diana put the eight thousand to her own account and spent an interesting three months planning and drawing expensive memorials to the departed Dempsi. In the back pages of a dictionary, under the heading "Foreign words and phrases," she discovered an appropriate epitaph.

SATIS ELOQUENTIÆ SAPIENTIÆ PARUM

"He had great eloquence but little sense."

As the years passed, and her uneasiness increased, she made half-hearted attempts to dis-

cover his relatives, though she knew that he was without so much as a known cousin. And then, gradually, Dempsi had receded into the background. She was beloved of a romantic squatter. This affair ended abruptly when the romantic squatter's unromantic wife arrived in a high-powered car and bore him off to serve the remainder of his sentence.

Diana gave exactly five minutes of her thoughts to Dempsi. For the remainder of the evening she practised a new waltz step which had surprisingly found its way into jazz.

"What I can't understand," said Trenter, "is why the boss allows this sort of thing to go on. It's downright improper, a young woman living in a bachelor's house. It reminds me of a case old Superbus once told me about—he's a court bailiff and naturally he sees the seamy side of life——"

"I wouldn't have a bailiff for a friend if you paid me a million," said Eleanor, who had been brought up in an atmosphere of financial embarrassment. "I'd sooner have a burglar. Don't you worry about our young Di, Arthur. She's all there! Personally speaking, I'm glad she's arrived. What about me—haven't I any morals?

Hasn't me and cook—cook and I, that is to say —lived in the same house with a bachelor for a year?"

"You're different," said Trenter.

"Guess again," said Eleanor.

"The house hasn't been what it was." A touch of sadness in Trenter's voice had its origin in obscure sources.

Methodical as Gordon was, he never counted his cigars. Diana, on the other hand, had an eye for quantity. It was she who asked delicately whether he thought there were mice in the house, and, if so, did he think that they preferred Coronas to cheese.

"There's a big change coming—a terrific change. I feel it in my bones," he said. "And I know! I've always had second sight even as a boy."

"You should wear glasses," said Eleanor.

CHAPTER V

On an afternoon in late summer Heloise van Oynne looked across the darkening river, seemed for a moment absorbed in the gay lighting of one of the moored house-boats, and then:

"Tell me some more about Diana, please. She must be fas-cinating!" she pleaded.

Her companion shifted a little uncomfortably. He had already said more about Diana than he wished or intended saying.

"Well . . . you know all about Diana. I hope you will meet her . . . some day."

There was just that little pause before the last word that meant so much to a woman with an acute sense of tone, and Heloise was super-sensitive because it was her business to be. To-day she seemed unusually ethereal.

She was pretty, slim (Diana would have called her "skinny"), spirituelle. In the deep, dark eyes was mystery . . . elusiveness; something that occasionally made his flesh creep pleasantly.

Gordon Selsbury was not in love. He was

not the easily loving kind. It pleased him to know that he had a mystery of his own—he had once been described as "sphinx-like."

If Diana had been older and were not his cousin, and had not in her masterful way installed herself in his house, defiant of the conventions, and were not so infernally sarcastic and self-sufficient—well, he might feel nicer toward her.

Talking of Diana. . . .

He looked at the watch on his wrist. He had told her he would be in for dinner. Heloise saw the movement and smiled inwardly.

"Was it serious, that affair of hers?" she asked gently.

Gordon coughed. Heloise never met him but she talked of Diana's affair. It was a curious piece of femininity that he did not expect to find in a woman. Not his kind of woman.

He was relieved of the necessity for answering.

"Who is that man, Gordon?"

The skiff had passed twice under the hotel terrace where they sat at tea that afternoon, and twice the big, red-faced man had peered up at the two people.

"I don't know. Shouldn't we be going?"

She made no attempt to rise.

"When do I see you again, Gordon? Life is so blank and miserable without you. Does Diana monopolise you so entirely? People wouldn't understand, would they? I don't love you and you do not love me. If you thought I loved you, you would never see me again." She laughed quietly. "It is just your soul and mind" —her voice was very low—"just the clear channel of understanding that makes our minds as one. Love doesn't bring that, or marriage."

"It is rather wonderful." He nodded many times. "Extraordinary—people would never understand."

She thought they wouldn't.

"I'm just aching for The Day to come," she said, staring across the river. "I don't think it ever will come: not The Day of my dreams."

Gordon Selsbury had this premonition too; had been waiting all afternoon to translate his doubt into words.

"I've been thinking the matter over, Heloise—that trip to Ostend. Of course, it would be lovely seeing one another every day and all day, and living, if not under the same roof, at least in the same environment. The uninterrupted contact of mind—that is beautifully appealing.

But do you think it wise? I am speaking, of course, from your point of view. Scandal doesn't touch a man grossly."

She turned her glorious eyes to his.

"'They say: what say they? Let them say,'" she quoted contemptuously.

He shook his head.

"Your name is very precious to me," he said, not without a hint of emotion, "very precious, Heloise. I feel that, although the Ostend season is past and most of the hotels are closed and visitors have dispersed, as I understand they do disperse from fashionable seaside resorts, there is a possibility, a bare possibility, that we should see somebody there who knew me—us, I mean—and who would put the worst possible construction upon what—er—would be the most innocent intellectual recreation. It is extremely dangerous."

She was laughing hardly as she rose.

"I see," she said. "You are really conventional underneath, Gordon. It was a mad idea—don't let us talk any more about it. It hurts me a little."

In silence he paid the bill, in silence followed her into his car. He was hurt too. Nobody had

ever called him conventional. Half way across Richmond Park he said:

"We will go: let us say no more. I will meet you as we arranged."

The only answer she made was to squeeze his arm until they were flying down Roehampton Lane, and then, dreamily:

"There is something Infinite in friendship like ours, Man. It is all too wonderful. . . ."

Diana was reading a magazine in The Study when Gordon came in. She threw down the magazine and jumped up from the chair (she sat at his desk when she read, with the exasperating result that the writing surface, which he left neat and ordered on his going out, was generally in a state of chaos on his coming in).

"Dinner," she said tersely. "You're late, Gord, devilishly late."

Mr. Selsbury's expression was pained.

"I wish you would not call me 'Gord,' Diana," he complained gently. "It sounds—well, blasphemous."

"But oh, it fits," she said, shaking her head. "You don't know how it fits!"

Gordon shrugged his shoulders.

"At any rate, 'devilish' is not ladylike."

"Where have you been?" she asked with that disconcerting brusqueness of hers.

"I have been detained——"

"Not at your office," said Diana promptly, as she sat down at the table and pointed an accusing finger. "You haven't been back since luncheon."

Mr. Selsbury cast a resigned look at the ceiling.

"I have been detained on a purely private business matter," he said stiffly.

"Dear, dear!" said Diana, unimpressed.

Nothing really impressed Diana. She had, she boasted, passed the impressionable age.

Gordon had come to admit to himself that she was pretty; in a way she was beautiful. She had blue eyes, willow pattern blue, and a skin like satin. He admitted that her figure was rather lovely. If she had been older or younger, if her hair had not been bobbed—if she had a little more respect for wisdom, an appreciation of thought, a little something of hero-worship!

He strolled gloomily to the window and stared blankly into the dusk. Diana was an insoluble problem.

Trenter came in at that moment.

"Trenter."

"Yes, sir." The butler crossed to his employer.

"Do you see that man on the other side of the road—that red-faced man?"

It was the stranger of the skiff. Gordon recognised him at once.

"I've seen him before to-day . . . rather a coincidence."

"Yes, sir," agreed Trenter. "That's Mr. Julius Superbus."

Gordon gaped at him.

"Julius Superbus—what the devil do you mean?"

"Language!" murmured a voice in the background. How like Diana.

"What on earth do you mean? That is a Roman name."

Trenter smirked.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Superbus is a Roman, the last Roman left in England. He comes from Cæsar Magnus—it's a little village near Cambridge. I used to be in service there, that's how I come to know him."

Gordon frowned heavily. By what strange chance had he come to see this oddly named creature twice in one day—at Hampton, rowing a boat with some labour; in Cheynel Gardens, ap-

parently absorbed in the study of a near-by lamp-post?

"What is he—by profession?"

"A detective, sir," said Trenter.

Gordon went suddenly pale.

CHAPTER VI

SOMETIMES, mostly all the time, Gordon forgot that before the name of Heloise van Oynne was that magical prefix "Mrs." Too nice-minded to discover, even by an indirect method, the extent of her indiscretion, Gordon had conceived in his mind a marriage between two persons diametrically unsuited one to the other. He fashioned Mr. van Oynne in the image of a gross, unimaginative business man, without soul, and saw dimly a struggle between opposing ideals; sullen fury or blank indifference on the man's part, and, in the case of Heloise, a refined suffering and an infinite restlessness in her, until there came into her life the other half of her intellectual being. Which was Gordon.

He looked out of the window again.

Mr. Julius Superbus was deliberately charging a black pipe from a sealskin tobacco pouch. He seemed the kind of man who would stoop to the meanest methods to gain his ends. And a prurient brute who would think nothing of writing

reports highly disparaging to a slim, aesthetic girl. A detective! In desperation he turned to Diana.

"Diana, do you mind if I have The Study for a little while? I want to see a man."

She waved a cheery farewell as she disappeared through the door at the far end of the room.

"Bring him in."

"Bring him in, sir?" Trenter was intrigued.

Gordon repeated the order.

"He's not a gentleman, sir," warned Trenter, desiring exculpation in advance.

This was in case Mr. Superbus was even less of a gentleman than he thought him to be. Gordon has never any illusions on the subject. He said as much tersely, and Trenter went forth in a spirit of joyful anticipation, knowing that the nature of this interview would be repeated to him when next he met his friend.

A wait, and then:

"Mr. Superbus, sir," said Trenter correctly. He bowed the visitor into the study, and withdrew.

There was nothing in the appearance of Mr. Superbus that was suggestive of Roman culture at its zenith. He was very short, and waddled

rather than walked. He was fat so that, if he were standing on two square feet of his own property, his waistcoat might have been arrested for trespass on neighbouring land. His face was very red and broad; he had a stubbly black moustache, which was obviously dyed; on his otherwise bald head, twenty-seven hairs were parted, thirteen on one side and fourteen on the other. He had often counted them.

He stood, breathing audibly and twisting his hat in his blue hands.

"Sit down, Mr. Superbus," said Gordon awkwardly. "Trenter was telling me that you are—in fact, you have the distinction of being a Roman?"

Mr. Superbus bent forward before he sat, as though to assure himself that his feet were all present and correct.

"Yes, sir," he said, in a rich, deep voice. "I believe I am. Us Superbusses"—he gave the word a pronunciation which suggested that he had been named after a public vehicle of unusual size—"have come down for generations. There's only four of us now—there's me, my brother Augustus, who's married to a young woman in Coventry; there's Agrippa, who's doing very well

with her third husband—this one doesn't drink, I'm happy to say—and there's Scipius: he's on the stage."

"Really!" said Gordon, dazzled for the moment.

"Yes, he's on the stage," said Mr. Superbus with great satisfaction, "and doing very well. They say he's the best carpenter they've ever had at the Gaiety. Yes, we're an ancient family. I've never got the rights of it, but an old gentleman who lives at Cambridge told me that, if everybody had his due, I ought to be a member of the Roman Royal Family, being the eldest."

Near Cæsar Magnus is the University of Cambridge, and there have been soured antiquarians who have suggested that the illustrious family of Superbus owed its origin to the freakish whim of certain freshmen whose gowns rustled in Petty Cury a hundred years ago. That these same students, in their humour, had adopted the family of an indigent carter, one Sooper, and had christened the family afresh. Mr. Superbus had heard these rumours and had treated them with contempt.

"How we came to start I don't know," he said, on his favourite topic; "but you know what women are when Romans are about!"

Gordon did not even trouble to guess.

"Now, Mr. Superbus, you have—er—a very important position. You're a detective, I understand?"

Mr. Superbus nodded soberly.

"It must be an interesting life, watching people," he suggested, "going into court and li—testifying to their various misdoings?"

"I never go into court," said Mr. Superbus. And here, apparently, he had a grievance. "My work, so to speak, is commercial. Not that I shan't go into court if a certain coop comes off."

"Coop?" Gordon was puzzled.

"Coop," repeated Mr. Superbus emphatically.

"What do you mean—coop? Are you looking for people who steal chickens?" asked Gordon, at sea.

"By 'coop' I mean—well, you know what I mean, sir. Suppose I bring off a big bit of business—"

"Oh, coup!" said Gordon, enlightened. "I see. You have a coup?"

"I always called it coop myself," said Mr. Superbus graciously, and leaving Gordon with the impression that he was being humoured. "Yes, I've got a coop up my sleeve." He lowered his

voice and stretched himself to as near Gordon as his body could reach. "I'm after Double Dan," he whispered hoarsely.

A heavy burden rolled from Gordon's heart. So the "Mrs." had nothing to do with the matter at all! Nor the gross husband, who thought more of his dogs and his horses than of the flaming intellect of his beautiful wife. (Gordon was thorough: the gross husband must have his pets.)

"I seem to remember the name," he said slowly. "Double Dan? Isn't that the man who impersonates people?"

"You've got it, sir," said Mr. Superbus. "He don't impersonate them, he *is* them! Take Mr. Mendlesohn——"

Now Gordon remembered.

"You'd never think anybody could impersonate him, though, with his white whiskers and him not being married, it wasn't so hard. He got away with eight thousand pounds, did Dan. Got Mr. Mendlesohn out of the way, walked into his private office and sent a new clerk out with a cheque. That's why Mr. Mendlesohn's gone into the country. He daren't hold up his head."

"Oh, I see," said Gordon slowly. "You're acting on behalf of——?"

"The Brokers' Association—he goes after brokers."

Gordon seldom laughed, but he was laughing softly now.

"And you have been following me round to protect me, eh?"

"Not exactly that, sir," said Mr. Superbus with professional reserve. "What I was trying to do was to get to know you, so that I'd make no mistake if Dan tried to 'double' you."

"Have a cigar?" said Gordon.

Mr. Superbus said he didn't mind if he did; that he would take it home, and smoke it in the seclusion of his own house.

"My good lady likes the smell of a cigar," he said. "It keeps away the moths. I've been married now for three and twenty years, and there isn't a better woman on the face of the earth than my good lady."

"A Roman?" asked Gordon.

"No, sir," replied Mr. Superbus gravely. "Devonshire."

Diana, coming into the room half an hour later, saw Gordon standing with his back to the fireplace, his hands clasped behind him, his head slightly bent, a picture of practical thought.

"Who was that funny little man I saw go out of the house?" she asked.

"He is a man named Superbus," said Gordon, roused from his reverie with a start, "who has been making certain enquiries. He's been trying to trace somebody who has robbed a man of eight thousand pounds."

"Oh!" said Diana, and sat down quickly. The ghost of the late Mr. Dempsi was very active at that moment.

CHAPTER VII

DIANA liked Bobbie Selsbury the moment she saw him. He was a smaller edition of his brother, a brusque, cynical young man, with a passion for revue and the more clingy variations of modern dancing. Also he was engaged to a girl in Canada, and had no intense interest in any other woman. She liked him most because he was entirely without that brand of soul which wriggled so frequently under the scalpel of his brother.

He came to dinner twice, and on the second occasion Gordon thought his relative was on sufficiently good terms with his unwanted guest, to discuss openly the impropriety of her continued stay.

"Bobbie is what is known as a man of the world," said Gordon. When Gordon introduced the virtues of his friends, he did so in the manner of a chairman at a public meeting bringing an unknown speaker to the notice of an audience. "He has a keener concept of relative social values

than either I, who am a little old-fashioned, or you, my child, who have led a cloistered life. I think we can safely leave the issue in Bobbie's hands. Now, Bobbie, I'm going to put the matter to you without prejudice. Is it right that Diana should be staying in the same house as I, without a chaperone?"

"I don't see why she should want a chaperone with a dry old stick like you," said Bobbie instantly. "Besides, you're cousins. She has certainly made Cheynel Gardens a place worth visiting, which it never was before."

"But the world—" protested Gordon.

"The other day you were telling me how superior you were to the world and its opinions," said the traitor Bobbie. "You told me that the views of the hoi polloi passed you by without making the least impression. You said that a man should rise superior to the test of public approval. You said——"

"What I said," snapped Gordon testily, "had a general application to certain schools of philosophical thought. It did not apply, and never will apply, to questions of behaviour and propriety."

"Diana is here, and you're a lucky devil to have

somebody to darn your socks. Does he pay you anything, Diana?"

She shook her head.

"I am living on my little capital," she said plaintively, and Gordon felt a brute, but it was not until the next morning that he raised the subject again.

"I'm afraid I've been rather thoughtless, Diana," he said. "Will you please buy anything you want and give me a note of any money you require?"

She leant back in her chair, laughing softly.

"You dear goop!" she said. "Of course I don't want money! I am rolling in riches."

"Then why did you tell Bobbie——"

"I like sympathy," she said calmly. "And nobody gives me sympathy except Eleanor. She's rather a pretty girl, isn't she?"

"I haven't noticed," said Gordon.

"I knew you hadn't," she said, "when I discovered that you'd never kissed her."

Gordon's mouth was occupied with bacon at the moment, but he stood up and made an unearthly noise of protest.

"No, I don't ask servants such questions," said Diana primly, "but a woman has instincts, and

there's always a way of finding these things out. Gordon, you are exonerated," she added with a generous gesture.

"Your philosophy of life is amazing," he said, after he had recovered some of his calm. "Whatever made you think I should kiss her?"

"Because she's pretty," said Diana. "All men want to kiss pretty girls if they're normal. Lots of people have wanted to kiss me."

Gordon raised his eyebrows without looking up. He was not revolted; he was simply resigned.

"You haven't asked me whether I let them," she said after waiting.

"I'm not interested," said Gordon coldly.

"Not a teeny weeny bit?"

Anxiety was in her voice, but he was not deceived. He had learnt by hard experience that when Diana was most wistful, she was usually gurgling with internal laughter. A terrible girl.

"I've only had two affairs," she went on, regardless of his distaste. "There was Dempsi and there was Dingo."

"Who was Dingo?" he was trapped into asking.

"His name wasn't really Dingo, it was Mr.

Theophilus Shawn. He was a married man with five children."

"Good God!" Gordon dropped his knife and fork on the plate helplessly.

"He never kissed me," she said. "His wife came and took him away just as I was getting to like the smell of cloves—he used to eat cloves. He said it made his hair grow. Whenever he ran short of cloves he got into his car and drove to the hotel to get some. He'd go a dozen times a day. He was staying with Auntie; she met him at a lecture on sunspots, but she didn't know anything about his wife until she came for him. She was an awfully nice woman, and thanked me for looking after her husband. She said she hadn't seen him sober before—she was awfully interested in him. I think wives should get to know their husbands before they're married, don't you?"

Mr. Selsbury sighed.

"I think you're talking a lot of abject nonsense," he said, "and I wish to heaven you'd get to know your husband!"

She smiled, but did not reply. She felt that he had been shocked enough for one day.

He was making as if to get up from the breakfast table when she remembered a question she wanted to ask him.

"Gordon, that man who came yesterday, the man with the Hebrew name——"

"Roman. You mean Superbus?"

She nodded.

"Whom did he want?" she asked, playing with her serviette ring.

"He was looking for a robber, a man named" —he cast up his eyes, trying to recall the title— "Double Dan, a swindler."

"Is that so?" drawled Diana, her eyes on the tablecloth. "Are you going, Gordon? What time will you be home?"

"When my business permits me to return," he said in his stateliest fashion. "Do you realise, Diana, that nobody has ever asked me that question in my life?"

"Why, I ask you every day," she said in wonder.

"I mean, nobody except you. My comings and goings have never been questioned, and for the life of me I don't see why they should be questioned now."

"I'm not questioning you, I'm merely asking

you," said Diana, aggrieved. "I only want to know because of dinner."

"I may not be home to dinner," said Gordon shortly, and went forth to an actuarial orgy, for business had improved at an enormous rate recently, and he was engaged in organising a new form of insurance.

He had at least the will power to put out of his head a problem which rippled the smooth current of his thoughts. Only in the luncheon hour did he return to grapple with the projected soul tour. He wished that Heloise had chosen some other venue than Ostend. Ostend in itself was improper, and associated in all respectable minds with licence and luxury. He felt that he might have been a little more firm about Diana staying on at Cheynel Gardens if he himself had not outraged, or contemplated the outrage of convention. . . . Convention was an ugly word, a bourgeois word. . . . What he really meant was . . . he thought in vain for a synonym. The Ostend idea was a mad idea, and he wondered who had thought of it. At the same time, there was no reason why he should be recognised if he kept away from the quay, where the incoming Continental boats pull in; and, if necessary, he could

alter his appearance slightly . . . he went hot and cold at the thought. There was something furtive and underhand about the very notion. Diana had made mock of those little smears of sidewhiskers, and he never went to the barber but that individual made some reference to the appendages. He had seriously considered their removal. Especially since Heloise had wondered why he wore them. She thought they made him look rather older than he was. It would be in the nature of a subtle compliment to her if he appeared on The Day clean-shaven. As to the other matter, one did not go to Ostend in a morning coat and top hat. He might wear his sports suit or—but he had a tailor with views, and to this merchant of habit he appealed on his way home. The tailor listened alertly.

"If you are going abroad, I should advise a couple of tweed suits. Grey checks are being worn by everybody—a check with a little red in it. No, sir, oh dear, no! Lord Furnisham had a suit of that character only last month, and he, as you know, is a man of taste and refinement. *And* one of the leading men at the Convocation of Laymen—a dear friend of the Archbishop's."

Gordon saw the patterns, was panic-stricken by

their joviality. And yet . . . Who would recognise Gordon Selsbury in a fashionable grey check with a little red in it?

"Rather noisy, don't you think?" he wavered.

The tailor smiled tolerantly at a bolt of blue serge.

"My clients do not think so," he said. He was so great a tailor that he had clients.

"Very well."

Gordon gave the order. He told himself that he was not committed to the trip. But if he did go, he possessed an outfit. That was a comfort.

Heloise was staying at the Majestic (if it was still open). Gordon would arrange for rooms at the Splendid—with the same contingency. They were to meet after breakfast every morning and lunch together at a little café on Place des Armes. On one day they would go to Bruges together and see the pictures. A tour of the Littoral was a possibility. Between whiles there were books to be discussed, the lectures of a brand-new exponent of a brand-new philosophy to be attended. He held what may be described as an ethical clinic at Mariakirk and was the original excuse for the trip. A party of Thinkers was projected to sit at the feet of De Waal (that was his name) and

learn laboriously the difference between right and wrong, right being what had hitherto appeared to be wrong, and wrong being proved, by the new school of thought and its principal exegete, to be so absurdly right that the wonder was that nobody had seen it all along. The party had fallen through. The new Master had been discredited by a newer, a German who demonstrated that there was neither right nor wrong in any kind of question whatsoever.

Gordon's dilemma was born of this projected Pilgrimage of Reason, and one aspect of the holiday worried him: the possibility of something happening which would make it imperative that he should be communicated with.

In reality this was the strongest argument against the trip. Only by taking somebody into his confidence could such an adventure be undertaken. Diana was, of course, impossible. Gordon pinched his lip and rehearsed the terms in which he would convey to his agent the exact character of his journey. His attempt to put into words so remarkable and so unbelievable a project left him with a cold sense of dismay. Of all the people he thought likely he started with Bobbie; he also ended with Bobbie.

Robert G. Selsbury had an office on Mark Lane, where, from ten o'clock in the morning until four o'clock in the afternoon, he bought and sold tea, coffee and sugar to his own considerable profit. Gordon had only been to the office once. He thought it was rather stuffy and rather redolent of the two principal commodities in which Bobbie dealt. His own office in Queen Victoria Street was both rich and chaste and odourless, except for the faint fragrance of lavender—Gordon was strong for germicides, and that mostly employed to destroy the ravaging microbe had that suggestion of the lavender fields. Bobbie never came to see his brother without the sense that he ought to be wearing a boudoir cap and bedroom slippers.

The principal stockholder of R. G. Selsbury Ltd. was examining a sample of china tea when his brother was announced.

"Mr. Gordon?" asked Bobbie incredulously, and when the girl confirmed the tidings: "Push him in," he said, and Gordon, who would have resented even the gentlest of pushes, entered unaided.

"What's the matter?" asked Bobbie.

Gordon seated himself very carefully, put down

his glossy silk hat on the table and slowly stripped his gloves.

"Robert, I'm rather in a tangle and I want you to help me out."

"It can't be money—it must be love. Who is she?"

"It is neither money nor love," retorted Gordon with some asperity. "It is . . . well, a delicate matter."

Bobbie whistled, and a whistle can be very offensive.

"I'm going to tell you the facts." Gordon had to struggle with himself; he was on the point of inventing an excuse for calling and making a hasty retreat.

"Is it about Diana?"

"No, it *isn't* about Diana," snapped the elder. "Diana has nothing whatever to do with it. It is like this—old man . . ."

The "old man" sobered Bobbie. It showed that his brother was not his normal self. So he listened without interruption to the lamest story he had ever heard; to the most transparent invention that had yet been displayed for the scorn of sceptic.

"Who is Mrs. van Oynne?" he asked at last.

"She's . . . well, I don't want to discuss her. I met her at a conversazione of the Theosophical Society. She's rather . . . wonderful."

"I should say so," said Bobbie drily. "Of course you won't go?"

It needed but this piece of assurance to decide Gordon.

"Of course I *shall* go," he said firmly. "I need the change; I need the intellectual recreation."

"But why go to Ostend to discuss souls? What's the matter with Battersea Park?" insisted Bobbie. "It's the most lunatic idea I have heard! And of course, if you're spotted in Ostend your name for henceforth and everlasting will be Waste Product Esquire. I suppose you're telling the truth. From any other man I wouldn't think twice about it; I'd know that it was a clumsy lie. Have you thought of Diana?"

A staggering question: Gordon was taken aback.

"I don't see how this affects Diana. What the dickens has she got to do with it?"

"She's an inmate of your house," said Bobbie, in a serious mood. "Any reflection upon your good name is a reflection upon hers."

"She can leave—I wish to heaven she would

leave!" retorted Gordon viciously. "You don't imagine that I intend allowing the possibility of Diana knowing to stand in my way? She is an interloper—in a way I despise her. She's hateful to me sometimes. Are you going to help me or aren't you?"

He flung the ultimatum across the table. Bobbie elected for peace.

"I don't suppose I shall have to wire to you much," he said. "Nothing is likely to turn up in your absence. What are you going to tell Diana?"

Mr. Selsbury closed his eyes wearily.

"Does it matter what I tell Diana?"

A brave question. In his heart he knew that a story must be invented, and a very plausible story.

"I'm not a particularly nimble liar," he said. "Think out something for me."

Bobbie sniffed.

"I am on my knees to you for the compliment," he said, but irony was wasted on Gordon. "Why not tell her you are going north for the shooting?"

"I dislike subterfuge," Gordon deprecated with a wry face. "Why should I tell her anything? When does shooting start?"

"It has started. Go to Scotland: it is remote. You're not likely to meet anybody you know because you won't be there."

Gordon thought the flippancy in bad taste.

"It is repugnant to me—this necessity for invention," he said. "Why must I give an account of my comings and goings? It is preposterous! I had better make my objective Aberdeen, I suppose?"

Diana! Of all the absurd arguments that had been raised against the Ostend trip, this was the most futile. The very mention of her name was a spur. By the time he had reached Cheynel Gardens the trip was definitely and irrevocably settled.

He found a cable waiting for him at home. It was from his New York agent, advising him that Mr. Tilmet would call upon him on the Friday, and he realised with a shock that the to be, or not to be, of Ostend had put out of his mind an important business deal. His agent had purchased on his behalf the business of Tilmet and Voight, a none too prosperous firm of marine insurance brokers, operating in one of those queerly ancient offices on the Water Front. Mr. Tilmet had expressed a desire to be paid the money, fifty thou-

sand dollars, in London, which he would visit *en route* to the Continent. The documents had arrived by an earlier mail, and Gordon had been advised that, the hour of Mr. Tilmet's arrival being uncertain, and his immediate departure for the more attractive countries of Europe being very likely, Mr. Tilmet would call at Cheynel Gardens to settle the deal. He glanced at the *Times* shipping list, noted that the *Mauretania* had been signalled five hundred miles west of the Lizard at twelve o'clock on the previous day, and made a mental calculation. He must have the money in the house to-morrow, though he objected emphatically to doing business except at his office. Still, the circumstances were unusual and the bargain excellent. He was not prepared to develop a grievance.

Making a note on his memorandum pad, and a second note on the cover of his cheque-book, he went up to dress. He was dining with Heloise, and was carrying to her the news that he had made a decision in the matter which she had thought, and which she had had every right to think, had been settled beyond doubt.

Coming down, he saw Diana on the stairs below. She also was in evening dress, a wonderful

creamy white. There were two ropes of pearls about her neck; she wore no other jewellery. He followed her into The Study, and, as she turned, stared. It was a transfigured Diana, something ethereal, unearthly in her loveliness.

"Why, Diana, you look awfully pretty," he said.

The generosity of his race compelled the statement.

"Thank you," she said indifferently. "I always look well in this colour. You are dining out too, I see? Where are you going?"

He hesitated.

"I'm dining at the Ritz," he said. "And you?"

"I'm going to the Embassy. Mr. Collings is over here on business; he called this afternoon. He's my lawyer and a darling."

Gordon murmured something agreeable. Diana, at any rate, was off his conscience for the night. And she certainly was lovely.

Receptive to his unspoken admiration, she purred a little to herself, then, to his wrath, undid the excellent impression that she had made by unlocking a drawer in his sacred table.

"I say, who gave you the key of that?" he asked indignantly.

"I found one that fitted," she said, without embarrassment. "The drawer was empty except for a few queer German books, so I threw them out and had the lock changed. I must have some place to keep my things."

He choked down his rising ire.

"What things have you got?" he asked.

"My jewel case."

"That ought to be in the safe."

"What is the combination?" she asked.

"Telma," he said, before he knew what he was saying. And not another soul in the world knew that secret!

Before his exasperation could find adequate expression, she had taken from the drawer and laid on the desk a small black object, at the sight of which Gordon recoiled.

"You really ought not to keep firearms in the house, Diana," he said nervously. "If you go fooling with a thing like that, you might do yourself an enormous amount of harm—in fact, kill yourself."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Diana. "I know that gun inside out. I could hit that keyhole three times in the five"—she pointed to the door.

"Well, don't," said he loudly. "Is it loaded?"

"Naturally it's loaded," she replied, handling the weapon tenderly. "There's nothing in the breach, but the magazine is full. Shall I show you how it works?"

"No, put the beastly thing away."

Diana obeyed, locked the drawer and put the key in her handbag.

"Telma—I must remember that," she mused.

"I'd like you to forget it. I really never intended telling you or anybody else the combination of my safe. It isn't right that you should know. You might inadvertently——"

"I never do things inadvertently," said Diana. "I do them maliciously, or sinfully, but I do them deliberately. You can drop me at the Embassy," she said, as Eleanor helped her on with her cloak. "You're so near to the Ritz that you could fall into the front porch. Unless you're going to pick up somebody?" She looked round at him suspiciously.

As a matter of fact, Gordon did intend picking up somebody, and his immediate objective was Buckingham Gate, where, in consequence of his change of plans, he arrived five minutes late. The restraint which Mrs. van Oynne showed was heroic. He was apologetic; under the influence

of the bright restaurant and soft music, explanatory.

"Diana again!" she said petulantly. "I almost think I dislike that Jane."

"Diana, you mean?"

"I meant Diana," said Heloise hurriedly. "Gordon, you don't know how I'm looking forward to Saturday."

"It occurred to me," said he, "that Saturday is rather a busy day, and the trains will be full with people going away for the week-end."

She drew a long sigh.

"We need not be travelling together," she said with resignation. "My, how scared you are!"

"I'm not scared," protested the injured Gordon. "I'm scared for you—yes. That is the only thought I have. By the way, I told Robert."

"That's your brother? What did he say?"

She was curious.

"Well"—Gordon hesitated—"Robert is a man of affairs, with little or no imagination, and at first he thought . . ." he shrugged his shoulders —"well, you know what a certain type of mind would think, my dear Heloise."

"Couldn't we go on Friday?"

"That's impossible. I've got a man coming to see me on Friday."

He explained at length Mr. Tilmet's business, and the method he would follow to discharge the debt.

Throughout the meal she observed that he was a little *distrait,* and explained his long silences by his dormant uneasiness about the forthcoming trip. In this surmise she was wrong. Gordon was thinking of Diana, and wondering how it was that he had never observed those factors of colouring and feature which had been so emphatic that night. In a way he had begun to tolerate Diana, and to find a grim amusement in his own discomfiture. She had proved a wonderful manager, had reduced expenses perceptibly; though her record of excellence as a housekeeper had been somewhat spoiled by an incident which came to Gordon in a roundabout way. She had entered the kitchen just after the butcher had left. One glance at the joint had been sufficient, and, as the butcher boy was gathering up his reins to drive off, a small shoulder of mutton came hurtling through the kitchen window. The elevation was excellent, the direction slightly

faulty; the shoulder of mutton caught the butcher on the side of the head and almost knocked him off his perch. Then Diana appeared in the doorway.

"Cold storage," she said laconically. "Bring home-killed meat, or never darken our doors again!"

The driver went off in a condition bordering upon hysteria. Thereafter, the meat supply showed a marked improvement.

At first Gordon had been serious when this matter was reported to him respectfully and inoffensively by Trenter, who drew a small commission on all tradesmen's bills and took a charitable view of their shortcomings. But now, sitting vis-à-vis his pretty companion, the matter occurred to him in a fresh light.

"Why are you smiling?" asked Heloise.

"Was I?" he said apologetically. "I hadn't the slightest idea. I was thinking of something —er—something that happened in my office."

Not in his wildest mood had he ever dreamt that he would lie about Diana.

Mr. Collings, that eminent lawyer, had many friends in London, including important personages at Australia House. Diana went into the

Embassy expecting a tête-à-tête meal, and found herself greeted by stately and elderly men and their stately and middle-aged wives. She was introduced to an Under Secretary for the Colonies, and manœuvred herself to his side when she learnt that he was one of the coming men in the Government. Diana had suddenly decided that Gordon ought to have a title.

CHAPTER VIII

When she got home that night she found Gordon had arrived before her. He was thoughtful, unusually subdued; most remarkable of all, was to be seen, for he invariably went to bed as soon as he reached home after a dinner or theatre, and never by any chance was he in a conversational mood at such hours.

"Good time?" he asked.

"Very. I met the cream of the Colonial Office. It was thin but genuine cream. Were you very late, and was she very annoyed?"

Such a query, ordinarily, would be ignored.

"Five minutes or so; the lady was naturally——"

"Peeved?" she suggested. "And it was a lady, after all? Gordon, let me see her?"

He smiled.

"She wouldn't interest you, Diana. She is rather an intellectual."

Diana was not offended.

"The only thing I approve about the Bolsheviks is that they killed off the *intelligentsia* first," she said without heat. "I suppose they got tired of

seeing their plays and hearing about their spiritual insides. What do you talk about—Bimetallism or Free Will?"

He humoured her, being in a somewhat sympathetic mood. The strain of holding friendship to lecture-hall level was beginning to tell.

"Books and people," he said lightly. "And you?"

She threw her cloak over the back of a chair, pulled a stool to the fire and sat down, warming her knees. Gordon, the soul of delicacy, strolled out of the line of vision.

"We talked about tradesmen and the superiority of Australian beef and the difficulty of finding servants and Mrs. Carter-Corrillo's fearful indiscretion—she went to France with the third secretary of the Montenegrin Embassy. She was only there three days, but, as Lady Pennefort said, there are twenty-four hours in every day. Some women are fools—and most men. This young man's career is ruined, even though he swears that their mutual interest in the gravel deposits of Abbeville was the explanation of the visit. They are both keen on geology."

"And why shouldn't that be the true explanation?" demanded Gordon stoutly, his heart warm-

ing to the geological third secretary. "Why should not men and women have mutual scientific interests?"

"We'll hear what the judge says," she answered complacently. "Mr. Carter-Corrillo is suing for a divorce."

"On what grounds—incompatibility of interest in strata?" sneered Gordon.

"Don't be silly. Conventions are the by-laws of society. It is presumed that, if you break a by-law, you are capable of breaking the law."

He stared, amazed at her cool inconsistency.

"Here are you, living, unchaperoned, in the house of a bachelor——"

"Cousins are different," she said promptly. "Nobody suggests that the third secretary is Mrs. Carter-Corrillo's cousin. That would make a difference. Besides, everybody knows how much you dislike me."

"I don't dislike you," after a moment's thought; "but if you think I do, why do you stay?"

"I have a mission," she said, with a finality of tone that brought the subject out of discussion.

Gordon broke the news of his impending departure after breakfast the next morning.

"I am thinking of running up to Scotland to have a shot at the birds," he said. He felt rather like a liar.

"What have they been doing?" she asked, her grey-blue eyes wide.

"Nothing. One shoots them at this season of the year. You have game laws in Australia, I suppose?"

"I don't know. I have shot wallaby and dingo and rabbits and things, but never birds. To Scotland? That's an awful long way. Gordon, I shall be worried about you. There was a railway accident in the newspapers this morning. You'll send me a wire?"

"From every station," he said sarcastically, and was ashamed of himself when she thanked him so warmly.

"I'm glad—that is my eccentricity, a horrid fear that people I like are in railway accidents. Of course, I could always wire to the station-master to enquire about you, or to your hotel."

Slowly it dawned upon Gordon Selsbury that in an unguarded and fatally foolish moment he had enormously complicated a situation already far from simple. To escape, to offer excuses, even to laugh off her anxiety, simulated or real,

was impossible. A solution came to him and was instantly rejected. It came again because it was, in all the circumstances, the only solution. But it was one that could only be applied at the cost of his self-respect. Almost he cursed Heloise or whoever was the fool who had suggested this mad excursion.

Trenter was laying out his master's clothes for dinner when Gordon strolled into his dressing-room.

"Um . . . don't go, Trenter. When did you have your holiday?"

"First week in April, sir."

Gordon considered.

"Do you know Scotland?"

"Yes, sir; I've been with several house parties for the September shooting."

"Good. The fact is, Trenter, I'm going away on a—a peculiar mission. It is a secret even from my most intimate friends. There are reasons, very excellent reasons with which I need not trouble you, and which you certainly would not understand, why I should go secretly to one place whilst I am supposed to be at another."

Trenter aimed wildly, but scored on the target at the first shot.

"A lady, sir?" he ventured respectfully, meaning no harm—offering, in fact, a tribute to the known chivalry of the Selsburys.

"No!"

There was reason enough for the large and angry blush that darkened Gordon's face.

"No, of course not. Business. Nothing at all to do with a lady."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Trenter, and was.

"We won't discuss my mission. What I want to say is this. Miss Ford, who is rather of a nervous disposition, has asked me to send her wires at intervals of the journey . . ."

"And you want me to go to Scotland and send them," said Trenter brilliantly. Gordon had never respected his servant's intelligence so much as he did at that moment.

"Exactly. It will save me a lot of worry. And," he added mysteriously, "if the wires fall into other hands, they will help deceive a Certain Person!"

Trenter nodded wisely. He couldn't guess who the Certain Person was: even Gordon did not know. But lying grew easier with practice —he had grown reckless.

"Not a word of this in the servants' hall," warned Gordon.

The servitor smiled. Gordon had not seen him smile before. It was a strange sight.

"No, sir; I shall tell them that my aunt in Bristol is ill (which she is) and that you've given me leave. How long do you want me to be away, sir?"

"A week," said Gordon.

Mr. Trenter went down to the servants' hall importantly.

"The old man's given me a week's holiday to see my aunt. I'm leaving to-morrow."

Eleanor was constitutionally suspicious.

"Bit sudden, isn't it? He's going away to-morrow too. You men are devils! Us women never know what you're up to."

Trenter smiled cryptically. It added to his self-confidence to be suspected of devilish deeds.

"Noos verrong," he said, and added the information: "French."

"Is Miss Diana going?" asked the cook.

"With me or him?" demanded Trenter insolently. "She's not going with *him!* And do I blame him? No! She's no lady, that's my firm opinion."

"Then keep it to yourself!" said Eleanor, shrill of voice. "I don't want you to say anything about Miss Diana!"

"You women stick together." Trenter could not but admire the trait.

"And you men stick at nothing." Eleanor's sincerity gave sanction to inconsequence. "She's too good for him. I suppose you're both off on some gallivanting business? So far as I am concerned you're welcome! You've been an experience, and every girl ought to have experience—up to a point. Your wife can have you."

"If I've told you once, I've told you forty million times that I'm not married!" hissed Trenter. "I had to be married because he wanted a married man for a butler, and if I'd said I was single I should have lost the job. That temper of yours, my girl, is going to be your ruin."

"Well, don't talk disp—whatever the word is—about Miss Diana," she sulked.

"I don't trouble my head about her, because I don't think there's anybody in the world like you, Eleanor," he urged.

She admitted later that there was much to be said for his point of view.

CHAPTER IX

In the early days, when Trenter had known him, Mr. Superbus was a court bailiff, a man who seized the property of unsuccessful litigants, who served writs, attached furniture, and committed all those barbarous acts peculiar to his office. But progression, the inexorable law of getting on, the natural craving for success, brought Mr. Superbus from the atmosphere of a dull county court to a small office in the Insurance Trust Building, and the distinction of having his name painted upon the glass panel of the door. He was officially styled "First Enquiry Clerk." The "detective" which was printed on the corner of his visiting card was wholly unofficial, and his request to his superiors that a nickel badge should be designed that he might wear on his waistcoat and display at fitting moments when it was necessary to disclose his identity, was refused as being "impracticable and undesirable."

The cinematograph is at once educative and inspirational. Mr. Superbus spent most of his

spare evenings in watching the pictures. Those he liked best dealt with the careers of young, beautiful but penurious girls, who were pursued by rich and remorseless villains, and were rescued in the nick of time from a fate which is popularly supposed to be worse than death, by a handsome young hero, with the assistance of a stern-faced officer of the law, who smoked cigars, wore a derby hat, and from time to time turned back his coat to display the badge of his calling. A film which had no detective, and dealt merely with the love of a millionaire's beautiful young wife for his secretary, was unpalatable to him, even though it featured his favourite artists and showed, in the course of its telling, tremendous railway accidents, landslides, riots and the enervating effects of cocaine.

Before the open window of his parlour, Mr. Superbus sat in a state of profound meditation. Though the day was chilly, he was in his shirt-sleeves, for he was one of those hot-blooded men in whom the variations of climate peculiar to his native land produced no effect. It was an open secret that he was one of those hardy souls who swam in the Serpentine every Christmas Day, preferably breaking the ice to get in, and his

portrait appeared with monotonous regularity every twenty-sixth of December in all the better-class illustrated newspapers.

His good lady came bustling in with a shiver. She restricted her own bathing operations to the decent privacy of a four by seven bathroom.

"You'll catch your death of cold there, Julius," she said. "Fancy sitting there from morning till night doing nothing!"

"I'm not doing nothing," said Julius quietly. "I'm thinking."

"Well, that's what I call doing nothing," said Mrs. Superbus, bustling round and laying the cloth.

She had an extraordinary appreciation of her husband's qualities, admired him secretly, but felt that the smooth harmonies of matrimony might well be disturbed if she committed the error of showing her feelings.

"It's beyond me how you puzzle these things out," she said.

"It's brains," explained Julius.

"You get such ideas," she said in despair. "I wonder you don't go on the stage."

It was her conviction that the stage was the ul-

timate goal of all genius; its greatest reward; its most natural line of development.

"This Double Dan is certainly a bit of a puzzle, though I've worked out bigger problems in my time, mother."

She nodded in agreement.

"The way you mended the cistern last week beats me," she said. "After that I'll believe anything. Who is this Double Dan?"

"He's a swindler," said Mr. Superbus, "a parasite of society, a human vampire—but I'll get him!"

"I'm surprised the police don't go after him," she said.

He was naturally irritated, and his laughter lacked sincerity.

"The police! No, mother, the man who's going to get Double Dan has got to be clever, he's got to be cunning, he's got to be artful."

"I don't know anybody artfuller than you, Julius," said his wife graciously, and Mr. Superbus accepted the compliment as his right.

He might speak disparagingly of the police, as he did; as all private detectives, authors of mystery stories and such-like are in the habit of do-

ing. But his knowledge that Double Dan was in London, the hint that had been whispered up from the underworld that Mr. Gordon Selsbury was to be the new victim; these and a hundred other little pointers of incalculable value came to him fourth-hand from Scotland Yard. After his midday dinner he put on his coat and strolled to Cheynel Gardens. Gordon was out, and he was received by Diana.

"Why, of course, you're Mr.——"

"Superbus," said Julius.

"The Roman!"

Mr. Superbus confessed to that distinction. He might have added "ultimus Romanorum," only he was unacquainted with the phrase. Instead he remarked, a little pathetically:

"There ain't many of us left."

"I bet there ain't," said Diana. "Sit down and have some tea. You want to see Mr. Selsbury, but he won't be back for an hour."

"I did and I didn't," said Julius the obscure. "What I want to do is to keep a certain eye on a certain fellow."

He did not particularise the eye, but Diana guessed that it might be that which was nearest to her: it looked the less glassy of the two. In

the matter of the certain fellow she sought information.

"Double Dan—I remember. Who is he, Mr. Superbus?"

"Well, ma'am——"

"Miss."

"You don't look it," he said gallantly, if vaguely. "This Double Dan is a desperado, and is believed to emanate from the West."

"Do you mean West London?"

"I mean America," said Julius, "where most of the desperadoes come from. And go to," he added, with a recollection of certain past defaulters, whose disappearance had been hampering to him as a bailiff of the court.

She listened attentively while Mr. Superbus described the misdoings of the impersonator.

"There's nothing this fellow can't do, miss," said Superbus impressively. "He can make himself fat, he can make himself thin; he can impersonate a tall man or a short man, an old man or a young man. By all accounts he was an actor onthealls."

"Onthealls?" She wrinkled her brow, thinking for the moment that Mr. Superbus had dug up one of those natty colloquialisms that en-

livened the Senate in those days when Cicero could always be depended upon to pass a few bright, snappy remarks about the Tribune Clodius.

"An actor onthealls," repeated Mr. Superbus, astounded that he was unintelligible.

"Oh, I see!" a great light dawning upon her mind. "On the halls? You mean the vaudeville stage?"

"So they say," said Mr. Superbus. "Anyway, he's been too clever for the regular police. It's now up to them who have made a study of crime, so to speak, to bring him to justice."

He looked cautiously round the apartment and lowered his voice.

"By all accounts, Mr. Selsbury's the next."

Diana sat bolt upright in her chair.

"You means he's to be the next person robbed?"

Mr. Superbus nodded gravely.

"From information received," he said.

"But does he know?"

"I've dropped an 'int, miss," said Julius. "But on the whole it's better that he didn't know. A man gets jiggered, so to speak, if he knows a crook is after him, and that hampers the officers

of the law." He shook his head. "Many a good case have I lost that way."

"What do you mean exactly by impersonation?" asked Diana, troubled. "Do you mean to say that, when Mr. Selsbury is out, somebody who looks very much like him is liable to walk into this house and help himself to anything that he can find?"

"Cheques mostly, or money," affirmed Julius. "He works big, this fellow. Nothing small about him, you understand. You could leave your silver around, and he wouldn't touch so much as an egg-spoon. He's one of the big gang—I've had my eye on him for years."

"This is very alarming," said Diana after a long silence.

"It is alarming," agreed Julius, "but at the same time, if you've got the right kind of man around to protect you, a fellow who's a bit sharp, it's not alarming. But he's got to be clever, and he's got to have experience of what I might term the criminal classes, I should say."

"You mean yourself?" Diana smiled faintly, not in the mood to be amused.

"I mean me," said Julius. "If I was you,

miss, I'd drop a hint to Mr. Selsbury. Maybe he takes more notice of what his daughter says."

At parting he took her hand in his own large, purple paw, called her "Miss Selsbury" and asked to be remembered to her father. When Gordon came home, she told him of the visit.

"Superbus, eh?" said Gordon good-naturedly. "He called for a tip. But why, in the name of heaven, he should start in to alarm you, I don't know. I must speak to the Association about it."

"He didn't alarm me at all," said Diana, "except when he asked to be remembered to my father, and said that you were more likely to be influenced by your young and gentle daughter——"

"Does he think I'm your father?" demanded Gordon indignantly. "That fellow's got a nerve! As for Double Dan, I shouldn't think very much about him if I were you, Diana. He certainly caught old Mendlesohn, but then, old Mendlesohn is a philandering old fool. He allowed himself to be trapped by the woman who works with the scoundrel and acts as his decoy duck."

The mail boat was in, Gordon noted, glancing

at his newspaper the next morning. He had arranged to remain at home that day, and his accountant called at the house with a carefully engrossed receipt form and the office cheque-book. Gordon filled a blank for eleven thousand and a few odd pounds.

"I want fifty thousand dollars in gold bills; you'll buy them at the Bank of England. Bring them back here in a taxicab, Miller. You have told the office that wires are to be telephoned to me? Good. I expect a message from Mr. Tilmet."

The message did not come until long after the bills had been deposited in The Study safe.

It was from Paris, to the effect that Mr. Tilmet had landed at Cherbourg and would be in London on the Sunday; he added that he would leave for Holland that same night. Gordon, in his genteel way, consigned the American to the devil.

He saw Heloise that afternoon. She was a being exalted at the prospect of the trip, and his last desperate appeal to her that it should be cancelled was unmade. They were to meet at a quarter to eleven on the platform at Victoria, and were to travel as strangers until they reached Ostend. The passage looked likely to be a good

one; the weather bureau reported a smooth sea and light easterly winds.

Trenter had packed his big carry-all, and had included one of the new suits—that grey check with a little red in it—which had arrived belatedly from the tailor. The case had been secretly transported to a hotel in the neighbourhood of Victoria, where Gordon had to change. Nothing remained to be done but to prepare the telegrams which Trenter was to send. He could do this with a light heart, for it had occurred to him that if, taking advantage of his absence, the criminal impersonator should call (he regarded this as the least likely of any happening) the wires would confound and expose him. He felt almost as if he were doing a worthy deed.

The first he marked in the corner "Euston," and inscribed "Just leaving, Gordon." He wrote a number of "Good journey, all wells" for York, Edinburgh and Inverness.

Surprisingly, Diana came to him that day for some money.

"I arranged the transfer of my money to the London branch of the Bank of Australasia, but there has been some sort of hitch. I called to-day and the transfer has not arrived. Save me

from penury, Gordon—I'm a ruined woman."

She displayed dramatically the empty inside of a notecase. Gordon felt a queer satisfaction in signing a cheque for her, recovered a little of the kind-fatherly feeling appropriate to their relationship.

"And to think that, if you had really turned me out, I should have starved!" taking the slip from his hand. "Gordon, behind a rugged and unprepossessing exterior, you hide a heart of gold."

"I sometimes wish you were a little more serious," he said in good humour.

"I'm always wishing that you weren't," she said.

Gordon was temporarily deprived of the fuil use of The Study in the afternoon. There could be no more remarkable proof of Diana's dynamic qualities than the arrival of post office linesmen to move the telephone from the hall to Gordon's room—and that within forty-eight hours of her notifying the Postmaster General of her desires. Gordon demurred at first. The telephone was an invasion of his privacy. Diana was flippant and he was in no spirit for a fight.

Bobbie was at dinner that night, and, when

they were alone, asked her a question that he had asked himself many times.

"Why do you stick this kind of existence, Diana? You've heaps of money and could be having a really good time instead of rushing round after Gordon."

She looked up under her curling lashes.

"Does Gordon want me here? Has he ever wanted me? No, sir! When I came I left my baggage in the hall: I intended taking his advice about hotels and things. I never had the slightest intention of stopping—till I saw him and heard him, and read the panic he was in at the idea of my remaining in the house, and heard him become paternal and my-dear-little-girly. So I stayed. The day Gordon wants me to stay—I go!"

The atmosphere of the house was electric: Bobbie felt it, Diana was conscious of an uneasiness that was not to be accounted for by the errors of banking officials. Even in the servants' hall hysteria made a mild manifestation. Eleanor had a premonition which she called by another name.

"I'm sure something's going to happen."

When she was nervous her voice grew high-pitched.

"Don't be ridiculous." Trenter's voice lacked confidence.

"I wish you wasn't—weren't going away," she sobbed. "I've got the creeps. That window man will do something. The moment I saw him I said 'that man's a villain,' didn't I, cook?"

"You did. You said 'I'm sure there's something wrong about that man,'" agreed cook.

As for Gordon Selsbury, he went to bed at ten. At one o'clock he was pacing his room. At three he went down to The Study and started the percolator working. Whilst the coffee was in process of making, he opened the safe and took out the fifty thousand dollars, counted them and put them back. The safe looked very fragile, he thought. Once this wretched trip was over he would attend to the matter. The house was not difficult to burgle. The big, stained-glass window—an enterprising craftsman with a penknife could get in. . . .

In a corner of the room flush with the window was a small door, hidden behind a curtain. This led to the courtyard and was never used. As to

its design, and what purpose it was intended to serve, only the builder and original owner of the house might testify. His name was Guggle-waite, he had been three times divorced, and was at the moment in heaven—or his well-edited epitaph lied.

Gordon went upstairs for his pass-key, opened the door and stepped out into the "garden." It was very dark and still, and the wet wind smelt sweet and fresh. Across the yard was a door that gave to a small side passage. The wall was high, but no obstacle to an active burglar. He shivered and went in again to his coffee and a returning serenity induced by the fire he had kindled and the comfort of his surroundings.

He would have gladly given a thousand—ten thousand—to cancel his fool adventure; to remain here with . . . well, with Diana. He told himself this with a certain defiance as though one half of a dual personality were challenging the other. Diana was really a dear. He wished he had been a little more loyal to her and had talked less about Dempsi . . . a boy and girl affair and perfectly understandable. On Dempsi, his identity, his appearance, he mused till the

light began to show in a ghostly fashion behind the painted window.

There was no thrill in the secrecy, the plotting, the wile within wile. Gordon smelt the meanness of it, and sometimes he quavered. It made matters a thousand times worse that Diana was so sweet about everything.

It had occurred to him that he would have to depend upon her to deal with Mr. Tilmet when he called. Nobody else could possibly cope with that elusive gentleman.

"Surely," she said without hesitation. "Have you the receipt ready and the final contract? It isn't worth paper unless it has been drawn up by an American notary. Auntie bought an oil well in Texas and she had to find an American attorney before the contract could be made."

"And she was swindled, of course?" said Gordon. "All these oil properties are swindles."

"She made seventy thousand dollars out of the deal," said Diana. "Auntie had an irresistible attraction for bargain money. The bills are in the safe?"

"With the contract and the receipt. Really, Diana, you're almost a business woman!"

"Your patronage is offensive, but I feel sure that you mean well," said Diana without heat. "Let me see that money."

He opened the safe and she counted it, bill by bill, before she snapped the door close and spun the handle.

"Good," she said. "I will have a spring clean whilst you are away. I have sent for a man to clean the windows of The Study. They are in a shocking state. And, Gordon, with Trenter and you away, I shall need extra help. I will have a man and his wife here. There is an attic room where they can sleep: is that in order?"

Diana was brisk, business-like, imposingly capable. Gordon realised that she was unconsciously ramming home her indispensability.

Eleanor, coming in to put the room in order, found him in his dressing-gown, asleep before the black ashes of the fire, and her squeal of fear woke him.

"Oh, sir, you gave me such a fright!"

He rose stiffly, blinking at her.

"Did I . . . ? I'm sorry, Eleanor. Will you send Trenter to me in my room?"

A bad start to a very bad day's business. He

ached from head to foot, until his bath gave him some bodily ease.

"Eleanor says you were asleep before the study fire. When did you come down, Gordon?" Diana asked at breakfast.

"About three o'clock, I think. I remembered work that had to be done."

She was concerned.

"Why don't you go by the night train—you could sleep?" she suggested, and he forced a smile.

"I shall sleep all right," he said with spurious gaiety.

The talk went off in another direction, and then Bobbie came in for final instructions. Gordon was unaccountably irritated by this act of devotion to duty, and his "Good-morning" was like the crack of a whip.

"After you have gone," said Diana, "I shall ask Trenter to show me such of your clothes as need go to the cleaners."

"Trenter is going before me," he said hastily. "He's catching a train to Bristol. His aunt is seriously ill."

"What on earth's the matter with you?" gasped Bobbie.

Gordon turned, ready to be offensive, but it

was not he at whom Bobbie was staring. Diana's face was ghastly; her eyes were wide with a terror she could not conceal; her skin the colour of chalk. Gordon jumped up and ran to her.

"Whatever's the matter?" he asked, in genuine alarm.

"Nothing," she said with a gasp. "Perhaps I'm feeling the parting. I always go like this when my cousins go away!"

"Have you had bad news?"

Her letters were open on the table. She shook her head.

"No; the butcher's arithmetic is a little embrangled. Ever heard that word before, Gordon? I guess you haven't! I found it in *Tom Brown's School Days.* Bobbie, don't stare, it's very rude . . ."

Under her covering hand was the letter she had been reading.

Mr. Dempsi was very much alive: was in London at that moment. The opening lines of his letter were significant.

"My bride! I have come to claim you!"

Dempsi always wrote like that.

CHAPTER X

TEN minutes later, Bobbie walked into his brother's room without knocking, and interrupted what seemed to be a very confidential interview. Trenter pocketed a sheaf of telegrams in haste, but not so quickly that Bobbie did not see them. He made no comment until Mr. Trenter, in his best suit and looking unusually spruce, had made a hurried departure.

"Trenter's going down to see his sick aunt," explained his master.

"He looks like that," said Bobbie. "The chrysanthemum in his buttonhole will cheer her immensely. Is the faithful Trenter in the swindle too?"

"I don't know what you mean by 'swindle,'" said Gordon loudly. "I wish I hadn't told you anything about it!"

"You wouldn't, only you wanted somebody to stand by you in case anything went wrong. That is, anything but you."

Gordon glared at him.

"I shall not go wrong, believe me!"

"I don't," said Bobbie. And then, hastily: "At least, I do, but nobody else would."

"You can't understand these—it's a hateful word, but there is no better—affinities," said Gordon, "these understandings and yearnings for something which—which—well, somebody else can't give you. Some magic that draws a man's confidence and kills all sense of time and obligation."

Bobbie nodded wisely.

"I know—a woman."

Gordon stood erect.

"Bobbie," he said awfully, "I tell you this is not an affair—at any rate, it is different from other kinds of affairs."

"So are all other kinds of affairs," said Bobbie. "That's why the judges have been working overtime. I dare say I *am* cynical: I can afford to be, I'm a bachelor. The lady has a husband?"

"Heloise is married," said Gordon gravely.

"Heloise? I must remember that name. And Trenter, I presume, is going into the country to post the necessary telegrams to give verisimilitude to an otherwise unconvincing narrative. I hate

quoting Gilbert at you, but the situation is a little Gilbertian. What is she like?"

Gordon was not inclined to particularise.

"Of course, if you're going to make trouble——"

"Don't be an ass," said Bobbie. "I'm not going to give you away because, for some extraordinary reason, I believe you."

A knock at the door: it was Eleanor.

"Will you see Mr. Superbus?" she said.

"No," snapped Gordon. "Get me a cab."

"Who's Mr. Superbus?"

"He's the detective I told you about; the man that is watching for Double Dan."

Bobbie whistled: it was an exasperating trick of his.

"Double Dan? By Jove! I didn't think of him. Gordon, you're taking a risk. Is there any money in the house?"

"I told you."

"You keep telling me you've told me things. I think your mind is wandering."

"There's fifty thousand dollars in the safe. Diana's looking after it. The combination word is 'Telma'—I told her, and I might as well tell

you. It is for Tilmet, who's calling on Sunday, but Diana will look after that."

"Double Dan," repeated Bobbie softly. "And you're the very bird he could impersonate to the life! Sometimes I do it myself unconsciously. A little pomp, a little strut, a little preciousness of speech——"

Gordon waved him out of the room. He had reached the limit of his patience.

Diana was out when he came down, and he was not sorry. Also, the telephone receiver was on the table; he replaced it in the hook.

"Where is Miss Ford?" he asked.

"Miss Ford had to go out. She asked me to say good-bye to you, sir," said Eleanor. "Will you see Mr. Superbus?"

"No, I will not see Mr. Superbus. Tell him—well, tell him anything you like. I've got a train to catch."

He was gone in such a hurry that Bobbie had not time to get the information he had come to procure—Gordon had not told him the address to which he was to wire. There was time to go after him, but his immediate objective was unknown. It was obviously too early for the train, and Bobbie had such a sense of delicacy that he

would not take the risk of a chance meeting with the fascinating Mrs. van Oynne. He sat down, waiting for Diana's return, and puzzling over the change which a letter had wrought in her. That it was a letter, he knew. Sharper of eye than his brother, he had noticed the closely written page beneath her hand. Diana had her secrets too.

As for Gordon, he was a fool, an utter, hopeless, dithering maniac! Bobbie got up and walked across to the safe, hesitated a moment, then manipulated the dial and pulled the door open.

Except for a receipt form and a four page contract, the safe was empty. Of money there was none!

CHAPTER XI

It was half an hour before Diana came back, and she still showed the effects of the shock she had received at breakfast time.

"Hullo, Bobbie!" She glanced at his face. "What is the matter?"

"Diana"—he spoke slowly—"you're in some kind of trouble."

"Some kind!" She flung her hat recklessly on the table. "Every kind, my dear child!"

He did not smile.

"Gordon told me that he had left fifty thousand dollars in the safe to pay an American who's calling on Sunday. He gave me the combination."

She stood before him, her hands behind her.

"Well?"

"The money is not there."

A little pause.

"And do you know why?" she asked.

"I don't know. I've been worried to death. He didn't take it?"

She shook her head.

"No, I took it," she said. "Bobbie, Dempsi is alive!"

"Alive? Dempsi? Impossible!"

She nodded many times.

"He is alive! I've had a letter from him this morning—thirteen pages—you could have used any one of them as a mustard leaf. I'm scared!"

"But I thought he was lost in the bush?" said Bobbie.

She smiled painfully and dropped into the chair in which Gordon had spent the night.

"He was found in the bush," she said. "He had fever or something and was discovered by the Jackies. They took him to their village. Bobbie, Dempsi is half Irish and half Italian. Which half is most mad? Because that's the half that wrote."

Bobbie considered for a long time.

"He knows you're not married?"

She shook her head.

"What?"

"No," said Diana calmly. "We talked on the telephone just after you left the room, and his first words were: 'Are you single? We'll be married to-morrow. If you're married, you'll be a

widow to-night!' I knew at once that it was Dempsi."

"What did you say?" he asked, awe-stricken.

"I told him I was married," she said, with such coolness that he was inarticulate. "I couldn't very well explain why I was here if I wasn't married, could I? Then he got so violent that I told him I was a widow. Bobbie, isn't lying easy?"

Bobbie could say nothing.

"Then he sprang another one on me, and I told him that I was living with my Uncle Isaac—I used to have an Uncle Isaac," she said in self-defence. "He was a sort of an adopted uncle. He died of delirium tremens. All our family have done something out of the common. I couldn't say I was living alone in this big house, and anyhow, Gordon is away. It's wonderful luck, his going."

Bobbie paced the floor in a state of supreme agitation.

"What about the money?" he asked.

"I owed it to him. Before he ran away into the bush we had a terrible scene. He wanted me to elope with him, and when I wouldn't, he said he would commit suicide. He was like a madman; he cried over me, he kissed my feet, and then went

off to lose himself in the bush. He didn't even do that properly."

"And the money?"

"He gave it to me, or the cat or somebody. Anyway, I had it. Dempsi hadn't a relation in the world, and I just banked the money with my own." She bit her lip. "I intended putting up such a beautiful monument to him," she added thoughtfully.

Bobbie drew a sigh of relief.

"Well, my dear girl, as you've obviously sent him the money, the worst is over. You can replace it: the banks do not close till twelve."

"How am I to replace it?" she asked scornfully. "I've no money in my own bank, except a few pounds that I opened the account with when I came to London. I took the fifty thousand dollars and put eight thousand pounds to my own account. Here's the rest." She drew out a wad of bills and handed them to him.

Bobbie looked at her aghast.

"But this Tilmet, this American—you've got to find the money for him?"

"I thought you'd get it for me," she said, her big eyes fixed pleadingly on him.

He looked at his watch.

"It'll want some doing. You can't raise eight thousand in real money in two hours. Is this money of Gordon's in your bank?"

She nodded.

"I'm sending Dempsi a cheque by special messenger. He's living in a little hotel in the Edgware Road."

"He mentioned the money then?"

"He made a casual reference," she said, "which my conscience probably magnified into a demand. Phew!" She fanned herself with her hand.

Bobbie locked away the remaining ten thousand dollars.

"I'll see what I can do. May I telephone?"

She nodded.

"You may do anything you please except ask me to marry Dempsi," she said wearily.

His first call was to his bank, and the conversation was not encouraging. Bobbie had just paid from his account heavy bills, and he was slightly overdrawn. To the suggestion that the overdraft should be increased, the manager turned an unsympathetic ear. And then, at the end of the third call, when Bobbie was in a condition of frenzy, Eleanor came in with a telegram, and the girl opened it quickly.

"Saved!" she whooped.

"What is it?" said Bobbie, snatching the form from her hand.

It was dated Paris and was from the American's secretary.

"Feared Mr. Tilmet has contracted measles. Will not be able to arrive in London for another fortnight."

"Thank God for measles!" wailed Diana.

Bobbie wiped his streaming forehead.

"I've a good mind to take the remainder of this money away," he said, "I don't like it being in the house."

For answer, she opened the drawer of the desk and took out the black-muzzled Browning.

"Burglars are my specialty," she said.

"Would you mind putting that lethal weapon away?" said Bobbie. "What a bloodthirsty little devil you are!"

"I am," said Diana. "There's murder in my bones at this particular moment. Yes, Eleanor?"

"Are you going to see Mr. Superbus?"

"I didn't know he was here. Ask him to come in, will you?"

Mr. Superbus came, in his stately, senatorial

fashion, and was introduced to Bobbie. It was obvious he sought a very private interview indeed, but Diana explained in what relationship Bobbie stood.

"I'm sorry to have missed Mr. Selsbury," said Julius. "Information having come to me last night through my secret agent about a certain party."

"You mean Double Dan?"

Diana reacted instantly. For the moment she hadn't a care in the world.

"It's no laughing matter, miss." Mr. Superbus shook his head, and invited, with a wave of the hand, bent forward to see his feet and sat down slowly. "No, it isn't any laughing matter, ma'am—miss. If he walked in at that door"—he pointed—"made up for the part, you'd think it was your father."

Diana raised a protesting hand.

"May I explain, in passing, that Mr. Selsbury is not my father?"

Julius graciously indicated that she had his permission.

"Dan is wonderful! I was telling my good lady only this morning that, if she sees a fellow

looking like me trying to get into the house when I'm supposed to be away, she must make him take his shirt off—I've got a lucky mole on my shoulder, miss—ma'am—miss. Why moles are supposed to be lucky I've never discovered."

Diana turned to Bobbie.

"This is rather alarming."

"Oh, I don't know," said Bobbie. "Lots of people have moles."

"Don't be absurd. I mean Double Dan."

"But why should he come here?" asked Bobbie, well aware that the contents of the safe, such as they were, justified a visit. But it was Mr. Superbus who answered.

"That's what they all say, but there's always a reason, miss. My good lady said to me 'Why should he come here?' but I pointed out that—what's in that safe? Any valuables there?" He pointed to the wall.

"Nothing very much," said Diana hastily. "Tell us some more about this person, Mr. Superbus."

Mr. Superbus smiled to himself.

"I'm the greatest living authority on him," he said modestly, "that's what I am! He's a very

plausible fellow, and works with a girl. Whether or not—well, let's say it's his wife. She wangles the information out of the fellow that Dan is going to rob. Do you see?"

Diana nodded.

"I see. She's a sort of decoy who gets to know the victim."

"Know him! Well, I should say she did, miss—it would be much easier to tell you everything if you was ma'am."

"Well, imagine I am," smiled Diana. "She gets to know him very well?"

Mr. Superbus nodded.

"I should say so! She starts a hand-holding friendship, if I might describe it."

"But surely not always?" interrupted Bobbie. "She didn't catch old Mendlesohn that way? He must be sixty-five!"

Mr. Superbus was amused.

"Sixty-five! Why, of course she did! The sixty-fivers are the worst. They're easy. Mind you, there's nothing more than a high-class friendship in it, if I may use the word. The people she likes to get hold of are the thinkers—she's got a classy line of language. You know the sort of stuff that highbrows talk."

"A soul, in fact?" smiled Diana. "Does she represent herself as being married?"

He nodded.

"Yes, there's always a husband in the background. Sometimes he lives abroad, sometimes he's in a lunatic asylum, but he's mostly out of the way."

Bobbie staggered and caught hold of a chair for support. Happily, Diana did not notice his wan excitement.

"And then what happens?" she asked, a little nervous as to whether Mr. Superbus was still confounding "miss" with "ma'am."

"Well, she lures him away," said Mr. Superbus. "There's no other word for it. She *lures* him away. And whilst they're away, up comes Double Dan with all the dear departed's little tricks—his voice, his funny little ways, which the girl has been studying and passing on to Dan. You understand, miss? I've collected all this information myself. It's a coop with me. 'Coop' is French for 'cop.'"

"And the girl?" asked Diana.

"Oh, she gets away too—pretends her husband's come back unexpectedly from foreign parts; but she does it so that the fellow can't re-

turn home. Usually he's told people that he's going away for a fortnight or so, and naturally, he doesn't want to come back."

"How perfectly disgusting!" said Diana with a wry face.

"That's what I say," said Mr. Superbus earnestly. "Having allowed a gentleman to go so far——"

"At any rate, we need not have any fear about Mr. Selsbury," said Diana with a quiet smile.

Evidently Mr. Superbus *had* fears about Mr. Selsbury. He looked around in his mysterious way, and then:

"He's gone out of town, hasn't he?"

Diana nodded.

"For any length of time?"

"For a week," said Diana.

Superbus rubbed his chin.

"It's rather a delicate matter, but I am a family man, ma'am—miss. Has he gone away on business—no chance of a——?"

"Of a what?"

"Of a lure?"

Diana laughed softly.

"Absolutely no chance." Diana was thinking

quickly. "What sort of a woman would this be —his confederate, I mean—pretty?"

"Handsome is as handsome does," replied Julius.

"Are you going, Bobbie?"

Bobbie was following the detective from the room.

"Yes, I've got to see a man," he said a little incoherently.

There was still time to catch Gordon, and he was resolved to take the risk.

With Bobbie out of the way, the girl rang the bell, and, when Eleanor came, she found her mistress at the writing-table, blotting an envelope.

"Put your hat on, Eleanor, and deliver this letter to the Marble Arch Hotel. Take a taxi."

"Yes, madam," said Eleanor in surprise.

"Ask to see Mr. Dempsi."

Diana made an attempt to be unconcerned, and failed dismally.

"If he kisses the letter, or anything like that—you mustn't be surprised. He is very impulsive: he might even kiss you," she added.

Eleanor stiffened.

"Indeed, miss?"

"He won't mean anything by it." Diana was tremulously diplomatic. "He always kisses people when he sees them. I—I shouldn't be surprised if he kissed me when he calls—we're old friends, and people do that sort of thing in—in Australia."

"Indeed, madam?" said Eleanor, her interest in the British Empire awakened.

"I'm afraid Mr. Selsbury wouldn't understand," Diana went on lightly. "Men are rather narrow. If you told him——"

"I should never dream of telling Mr. Selsbury, madam," said Eleanor indignantly.

The girl came in dressed before she went.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Ford, but it has just occurred to me," she said hesitantly. "If this foreign gentleman should kiss me, might I be bold enough to ask you not to mention it to Trenter?"

"You may rely on me, Eleanor," said Diana firmly. "We women must stand together."

She watched the girl through the window till she was out of sight, then flopped back in her chair. The papers stood in a rack at her hand, unopened, unread. She reached out and found one, but there was no drama that could quite over-

shadow that which was being played out in her heart.

She heard a tap and looked round. It was not at the door; it seemed to be at the stained-glass window. There was a little window square, level with the ledge, which could be opened and closed as a casement, and against this she saw the shadow of a head, and, with her heart thumping wildly, walked across the room.

"Who is there?" she asked.

Then came a voice that chilled her to the marrow.

"Don't you know me, beloved?"

"Mr. Dempsi!" she gasped. "You mustn't come here, really you mustn't! My—my Uncle Isaac isn't at home, and I can't receive you."

With an effort of will she jerked open the window and looked down upon a bearded face and eyes that shone. A wide-brimmed sombrero at the back of his head; hanging from his shoulders, a long black cape. He might have stepped from an opera.

"I—I can't see you now, really I can't! Won't you call next Wednesday week?"

So that was Dempsi! She remembered dimly

some resemblance to the bare-faced boy she had known. Perhaps that wild glitter of eye, that furious gesticulation.

"Diana," he breathed, "I've come back from the grave to claim you!"

"Yes, yes, but not now," she said, in an agony of apprehension. "Go back to your grave till three o'clock. I'll see you then."

The shadow disappeared. How had he got there? Curiosity. Opening the window an eighth of an inch, she saw him scaling the wall with an agility which would have been admirable in any other conditions. Slowly she walked up the stairs to her room, closed and locked the door behind her, and sat down heavily on her bed.

Once upon a time her aunt had carefully loaded a shot-gun designed for this same Dempsi. Tears came into her eyes.

"Dear auntie!" she half-sobbed. "You understood men so well!"

CHAPTER XII

GORDON hesitated a little time before the mirror in his bedroom at the hotel, the razor poised in his hand, his cheeks crisp with lather. There is no more solemn act undertaken by man than destruction of such facial landmarks (if the term be allowed) as are represented by cultivated hair. There is something so irrevocable, so tremendous in self-destruction of whiskers, that it is amazing so few great poets have utilised the theme.

Setting his jaw, Gordon attacked with a firm hand, the bright blade flashed in the pale sunlight . . . the deed was done. Rubbing his face clean of lather, he gazed in surprise at the result. His appearance was wholly changed. It would not be extravagant to describe it as improved. Those two flickers of the razor had made him ten years younger.

"Boyish!" exclaimed Gordon, neither in despair nor pleasure, yet with something of both emotions.

Until then he had not seen the suit, that fashionable grey check with a little red in it. His

first impression of the pattern had mellowed with time . . .

"My God!" breathed Gordon.

He was not a profane man. Once Diana had wrung from him such an expression, but Diana and her startling point of view was the mildest of provocation compared with the horror that lay unfolded on the bed.

As a length of cloth it had called for attention. It was humanly impossible to pass it by without some such comment as "That is rather unusual." But in the piece it had dignity; there was a suggestion of weavers' genius and ingenuity.

As a suit, embellished with a saucy waist, and with buttons that were in themselves a quiet smile . . . Gordon felt a trickle of something at his temples and requisitioned his handkerchief. He could not possibly wear this. The alternative, for a short sea voyage, was a black morning coat and top hat—equally impossible.

Time was flying. He put on the trousers. They did not look so bad . . . he dressed.

Standing before the long glass in the wardrobe, he looked and wondered. One thing was certain: not his dearest friend would recognise him—and his overcoat would hide much. The reflection

of this new Gordon Selsbury fascinated him.

"How do you do?" he asked politely.

The figure in the mirror bowed gravely. He was a perfect stranger to Gordon, a young bookmaker, Gordon thought, and was growing interested when he realised with a shock that it was himself. Packing hastily, he rang the bell three times for the valet. If you rang twice the porter came, once, the chambermaid. So he rang three times. The chambermaid appeared. Happily the hotel is a house of call. Guests come overnight and leave in the morning. Nobody recognises anybody except under the urgent promptings of lawyers' clerks, supported by the visitors' book. Ten per cent. of the staff was permanently giving evidence at the law courts.

"The valet," said Gordon and, when that individual appeared, gave instructions regarding the grip containing his discarded suit and hat-box. It occurred to him at that moment that one does not journey to Scotland in a top hat, and he was rather glad that Diana had been out when he left.

"I want these things to be kept in the hotel cloak-room," said Gordon. "I will be back next Friday night and collect them."

Now the valet knew him; had seen him, not at

the hotel, but at a very select club in Pall Mall where the man had been a waiter before the craze for improvement had driven him to the brushing of odd people's odder clothing.

"Excuse me, sir, you're Mr. Selsbury, aren't you?"

Gordon went red.

"Yes, I am Mr. Selsbury," he said with a touch of hauteur. His signature in the visitors' book was unintelligible. The reception clerk thought it was Silsburg.

"I don't think I should leave your bag in the hotel, sir," said the valet gravely.

Something of authority upon the ritual of adventure, he spoke with the best of intentions.

"Next Friday particularly we've got a big dinner here—to one of the Colonial Premiers. The hotel will be full of people—you don't want to meet anybody you know?"

The assumption that he was privy to the clandestine character of Gordon's movements made the visitor incapable of protest.

"Tell me the train you're coming by; I'll meet you at the station with the grip—I'll put it straight away into the railway parcels office," said the valet gently, almost tenderly.

Gordon could think of no improvement on this method; at the same time, the valet must be under no misapprehension.

"Thank you—er——"

"Balding—I used to be a waiter at the Junior University Club, sir."

"Yes, of course. I think your idea is an excellent one. The fact is, I'm leaving London on a . . . mission, and I have to be very careful . . . thousands of pounds are involved."

"I see, sir."

Balding was so serious as to be almost plaintive. He had met gentlemen at the hotel in similar circumstances, only *they* had said that they were in the secret service.

"Thank you, sir . . . very kind of you, I'm sure."

Balding slipped the note into his waistcoat pocket indifferently.

"I'll take this now, sir." He lifted the grip from the bed. "Will you be coming by the first or the second continental on Friday? Ostend four-thirty, Paris eight-thirty."

"Four-thirty," said Gordon.

The die was cast. He gathered the second and smaller grip, paid his bill at the desk and went out.

It was chiming the quarter before eleven when he entered Victoria Station; the train left at twelve. There was no need to rush for seats. He had his Pullman reservation in his pocket. Happily the day was raw, the sun and rain alternately, blustering wind all the time. He could turn up the collar of his greatcoat. On the indicator board he read:

"Wind N. N. W. Sea moderate to rough. Visibility good."

He was glad, at any rate, that the visibility was good.

And then he looked around for Heloise. They had arranged to meet for the briefest space of time.

At ten minutes to eleven, he grew restive, was on the point of picking up his valise, when he saw her hurrying toward him, glancing furtively behind. And there was something in her face that made his breath come a little more quickly.

"Follow me into the waiting-room!"

She had passed him with this muttered message. Like a man in a dream, Gordon picked up his bag and followed. The big waiting-hall was

nearly empty, and to its emptiest corner she led him.

"Gordon, a dreadful thing has happened." Her agitation communicated itself to his unquiet bosom. "My husband has returned unexpectedly from Kongo. He is following me . . . he is mad—mad! Oh, Gordon, what have I done!"

He did not swoon; rather, he experienced all the sensations without losing consciousness.

"He swears I have transferred my affections, and says he will never rest until he stretches the man dead at my feet. He said he would do dreadful things . . . he is a great admirer of Peter the Great."

"Is he?" said Gordon. It seemed a futile question to ask, but he could think of nothing else. And he was not a little bit interested in Mr. van Oynne's historical leanings.

"Gordon, you must go on to Ostend and wait for me," she said rapidly. "I will come as soon as possible . . . oh, my dear, you don't *know* how I'm feeling!"

Gordon was so immensely absorbed in his own feelings that he made no effort of imagination.

"Didn't you tell him that our . . . our friendship was just . . . spiritual?" he asked.

Her smile was faint and sad and shadowy. A ghost who had overheard a good one in a smoking-room might have laughed as hilariously.

"My dear . . . who *would* believe that? Now hurry, I must go."

Her little hand trembled for a second on his arm and she was gone.

He picked up his bag: it was curiously heavy: and followed her into the station. She was nowhere in sight. A porter stretched a suggestive hand toward his baggage.

"Continental train, sir . . . have you got a seat?"

Gordon looked up at the clock. It wanted five minutes of eleven.

"Eleven-five the boat train, sir," said the porter.

"Eleven-five? I thought it was eleven," said Gordon numbly.

"There's plenty of time, sir."

Still Gordon stood, motionless. For some extraordinary reason his mind had refused to function; he was wholly incapable of decision or movement. The engine of his faculties had gone cold and refused to start.

"Get me a cab, please."

The mechanism of the request saved him.

"Yes, sir."

The bag was taken from his unresisting hand. He followed the porter to the busy courtyard, pathetic in his helplessness.

"Where shall I tell him to go, sir?"

The porter stood invitingly, the cab door in his hand, a friendly smile on his face. He had not yet been tipped.

"Scotland," said Gordon hollowly.

"Scotland—you mean Scotland Yard?"

This touched the spring: all the wheels in Mr. Selsbury's mind began revolving at once.

"No, no—to the Grovely Hotel. Thank you very much."

The gratuity that Gordon crushed into the outstretched hand was munificent, princely. One glance at its value and the porter staggered against the door, closed it with a strangled "Grovely!" and the cab rattled out of the station precincts.

At that moment Bobbie Selsbury was engaged in a frenzied seat-to-seat search for his erring brother.

Gordon was cooler now, though not out of danger. He could think: he could also for the

moment inhibit thought. A jealous and revengeful husband, probably armed, certainly homicidal, and a student of Peter the Great and his methods, could not be wholly inhibited. Gordon wondered whether in his library he had a really frank and unexpurgated history of Peter.

The hotel linkman opened the door of the cab, professionally pleased at his return.

"Keep the cab," warned Gordon. He was by no means certain that he was capable, unaided, of calling another.

At the desk of the reception clerk he recovered his key and the right to its employment, and carrying his bag to his room, rang the bell three times for the valet. The porter answered him, but not by mischance, as was proved.

"Balding is off duty, sir," he explained. "He goes off at eleven on Saturdays."

"When will he be back?"

"On Monday, sir. We have a whole day every second week. Is there anything I can get you, sir?"

Gordon shook his head. He only wanted his bag and his lost respectability. Removing his overcoat, he looked at himself in the glass.

"That isn't me," he said brokenly.

His appearance had changed, even in the short space of time elapsing between this and his last inspection.

The type was hideously familiar. He had seen it once in a vulgar film where everybody chased everybody else. He remembered that the heroine wore white stockings and black boots.

There were two alternatives. He might remain a prisoner in that room until Balding returned from his holiday; he could go home, get into the house unobserved and change. He had many black-tailed coats, batteries of silk hats, forests of quiet, grey-striped trousers. This idea was more attractive. Diana would lunch at one o'clock; the dining-room was across the hall from The Study. It would be a simple matter to slip upstairs, change and come down to meet the astonished eyes of Diana. How surprised she would be, and how amusing and unbending he would be!

"Didn't expect to see me, eh? Well, the fact is, I had an important cablegram—just as I was getting into the train. My sidewhiskers? Yes, I took them off as a little surprise for you. Rather an improvement, don't you think?"

His heart warmed to the plan, and there was a

glow in the thought that the desire of the morning, that he should sleep in his own bed that night, would be gratified. And there was the companionship of Diana, hitherto an unconsidered attraction. Diana grew on him: he admitted this to himself. If Heloise did go after him to Ostend, that would be unfortunate. He hated the idea of giving her a journey for nothing. But she would not leave for a day or two, and he would find means of communicating with her . . .

He shuddered; for at the back of the vision of Heloise, stood the large, brutal husband who was mad, mad.

There were two hours to wait before he could put his plan into operation. He telephoned from his bedroom to a bookseller's in the Buckingham Palace Road.

"Have you a good life of Peter the Great?" he asked.

They had two. He ordered them to be sent to him immediately. He was rather amused with himself.

He was less amused when he heard of the fate of one who had aspired to the affections of Catherine, and whose head had been placed into a large

glass jar and displayed in Catherine's boudoir to remind her that husbands have their feelings. There was another gentleman who loved Catherine, and him Peter had hanged on a high gibbet, under which he promenaded arm in arm with Catherine. The arm and arm was a domestic touch not lost upon Gordon. On the whole, he decided thoughtfully, a profound admiration for Peter's character would have no softening tendency upon any man, especially a man who was mad, mad.

He put away his book, drew on his overcoat, and, passing down in the elevator, found his cab still waiting, the meter bloated with charges. He had forgotten all about the cab.

At the corner of the street he paid the man and walked rapidly into Cheynel Gardens, his nose showing above the collar of his overcoat. Happily, the street was empty. He almost ran when he reached the familiar façade of his house, turned into the side passage, and, with a trembling hand, fitted the key into the lock of the back gate. Suppose it were bolted? The horrid doubt was no sooner in his mind than it was dispelled. The key turned easily, and he found himself looking up at the familiar window of his study.

Tiptoeing to the little door, he listened. There was no sound, and, with minute care to avoid making the slightest noise, he pushed his pass-key slowly in the lock, and pushed the door open a fraction of an inch. Not a sound. He opened it a little further, slipped behind the curtain which hid the door, and closed it behind him.

The room was empty, the two doors into the hall ajar. He could hear the solemn ticking of the grandfather clock on the staircase.

His first step, he had decided, must be to get into touch with Bobbie. Listening at the hall door, he heard the click of steel on china—Diana was at lunch, as he had expected. He closed first the baize, and then the inner door softly, shot a bolt and tiptoed across the room. Bless Diana for bringing the telephone into The Study!

Bobbie's office responded. A late leaving clerk had heard the ring of the 'phone and came back to answer.

"No, sir, Mr. Selsbury is not in to-day."

Gordon rang off without disclosing his identity, and tried Bobbie's lodgings in Half Moon Street, with no better success. He was wasting valuable time, he realised, and Bobbie could wait. He put on the receiver and stood up, stretching himself,

with an easy, happy, home-coming smile. Yes, Diana would be surprised.

He crossed the room to the hall. His hand was on the handle when, glancing round, he saw the curtain which hid the door into the courtyard move and billow. He had left the door open, he thought, and was on the point of returning to close it, when a hand came round the edge of the curtain, and he stood, frozen to the spot. Again the draperies moved, and a woman came into view. It was Heloise!

Gordon did not believe the evidence of his eyes. She was some vision conjured up by an overheated brain, a symptom of disordered nerves.

"You are not real," he said dully. "Avaunt!"

"Gordon!"

The outstretched hands, the plea in her eyes. Gordon Selsbury stood with his back to the door.

"How did you come here?" he croaked.

"Through the garden gate—the way you came . . . I followed you. Gordon, he is furious! You must protect me."

He could only stare at her owlishly.

"You mean—Peter?" he nodded.

"Peter? No, my husband, Claude. He knows everything!" dramatically.

"Is he . . . an editor?"

He was talking foolishly: nobody knew that better than Gordon; but the works were beginning to slow down again. And then she came to him and dropped both her hands on his arm.

"You want me to stay here, don't you? You won't turn me out . . . ? He followed me, but I slipped him."

"Stay here?" Gordon hardly recognised his own voice. "Are you mad?"

She looked at him suspiciously.

"Are you married?"

"No." And then a flashing inspiration. "Yes."

"Yes-no," she said impatiently. "What are you—divorced?"

"No. You see how absurd it is, Heloise."

"You are married to Diana." She pointed an accusing finger.

Gordon could only nod idiotically.

"You really must go," he squeaked. "This may mean ruin for me!"

Her lips curled as she drew back, hands on hips.

"Do I get any of that ruin?" she demanded.

"You must go back to your husband." His

brain was alert now. "Tell him you have made a mistake——"

"He pretty well guesses that," she interrupted bitterly, and slowly took off her wrap.

Instantly Gordon seized it.

"Put it on, put it on!" he wailed, but she twisted herself loose.

"I will not go, I will not! Oh, Gordon, you can't turn me out after all we've been to one another! After all the confidences!"

He was pushing her toward the courtyard door, a man beside himself, frenzied with fear, terrified beyond hope of succour.

"Out of the side door!" he hissed. "I will meet you in half an hour, at a teashop somewhere. Heloise, don't you realise my reputation depends——"

It needed but this to pull the mask from her face.

"Teashop! I am to be thrown to the lions!"

He looked hard at her. Could a woman pun in such a solemn moment?

"As to your reputation," she drawled coolly, "that sort of thing doesn't make me get out of bed and walk round, I assure you! I will not leave this house—alone!"

Gordon covered his mouth with his hand. He was in no danger of talking. He wanted to cover her mouth with his hand, but she was too far away. It was an involuntary gesture which silenced her. She heard the knock at the door, and then Diana's voice:

"Who is there?"

He pointed to the side door, grimacing. Heloise was adamant.

"Who's there?" said Diana.

"Side door," whispered Gordon frantically.

Heloise shook her head, hesitated, and then stole silently behind the curtain into the recess. It was her final compromise.

"Who is there? Who locked the door?"

Diana's voice was urgent. Gordon straightened his coat, smoothed his hair, unlocked the door and threw it wide open.

"It's all right, dear." He was grinning inanely like a cat. "Ha ha—it's only Gordon—Gord, as you would say! I'm just coming out . . . here I am back again . . . like a bad penny."

In Diana's eyes was a glitter which he did not like, and as she advanced he backed instantly before her.

"Only old Gordon—ha ha!" he said feebly.

"Very funny. I'll laugh to-morrow," said Diana.

The vulgarity of the ancient music-hall gag did not even arouse him.

"So it's only old Gordon, is it?" She nodded wisely. "Sit over there—old Gordon!" She pointed to a chair.

"Now look here, my dear girl." It was a very colourless imitation of his best manner. "The whole thing can be explained. I lost my train. . . ."

She was opening a drawer in the writing table, slowly, deliberately, her eyes never leaving his face. When her hand came to view, it held a Browning.

Click! The jacket snapped back. It was loaded.

"What are you doing, Diana?" he squeaked again.

Her eyes were now murderous.

"Will you be good enough not to call me Diana?" she asked icily. "So you've come, have you? And even I, who expect most things, didn't expect you. But, my friend, you've come at an opportune hour!"

"Look here, old girl—" he began.

"You can omit the familiarities." She waved him down to his chair. "Never imagine that you will deceive me—I know you!"

"You know me?" he said hoarsely. He had come to a point where he wasn't quite certain whether he knew himself.

"I know you," she repeated slowly. "You're Double Dan!"

He leapt to his feet, the pistol covering him. Waving wild hands, he strove to speak.

"You're Double Dan," she said, and the fire in her eyes was now ominous. "I've heard about you. You're the impersonator. You and your woman confederate lure innocent men from their homes, that you can rob them." She looked round. "Where is the woman? Doesn't she appear on the scene, or does her work finish when the luring is completed?"

"Diana, I swear to you you're mistaken. I'm Gordon, your cousin."

She smiled slowly.

"You haven't been as careful as usual, Dan. And the fact that I call you by your Christian name need not inspire you with a desire to get better acquainted. You haven't studied him.

My cousin, Gordon Selsbury, had little side-whiskers—didn't you know that?"

"I—I had an accident. In fact," said Gordon, "I took them off . . . to please you."

Her sneering smile chilled him through and through.

"My cousin Gordon is not the kind of man who would have an accident with his whiskers," she said with cold deliberation. "Where is your lady friend?"

He tried to look away from the curtained recess, stared solemnly ahead of him, but involuntarily his eyes strayed to the garden door. And then Diana saw the slightest of movements.

"Come out, please," she said.

There was no response.

"Come out, or I'll shoot!"

The curtain grew agitated. Heloise, white of face, flew across the room, flinging herself upon Gordon's heaving bosom.

"Don't let her shoot me! Don't let her shoot me!" she shrieked.

Diana looked and nodded.

"So this man is your husband!" she said.

Walking back to the door, she closed it.

"Now listen to me, Double Dan and Mrs.

Double Dan, or whatever your names may be. You are here to commit a felony, and I could, if I wished, send for the police and hand you over to justice. I'm not sure that I shan't take that course. For the moment, however, your presence is providential."

And then, in scorn:

"Gordon Selsbury! Do you imagine Gordon Selsbury would bring a woman to this house furtively? Do you imagine he would come dressed like a third-class comedian? Never dare mention Mr. Selsbury's name again in my presence!"

Gordon opened and closed his mouth, but no words came.

"You will stay here until I give you permission to go."

She went to the garden gate, closed and slammed it, then came back to Gordon.

"You had a key? Give it to me," she said curtly.

Gordon obeyed, lamb-like, watching her as she double-locked the door. And then he made his last desperate attempt.

"Diana, I can explain everything," he said hoarsely. "I am—the fact is—I'll tell you the

truth. I was going abroad, and the fact is, I am Gordon, although I may not seem so. I admit I'm wearing the most disgustingly loud suit, and that I have in other ways changed my appearance, but that also can be explained."

There was a knock on the panel of the door.

"Wait," said Diana, and walked backward to the entrance. "Who is it?"

"Eleanor, madam. A telegram."

"Push it under the door."

An orange envelope came into sight, and, picking it up, she tore away the cover and read the form.

"Go on," she signalled to Gordon. "You say you are Gordon Selsbury? Tell me some more. But before you do so, listen to this:

"'Just leaving Euston. Take care of yourself. Gordon.'

"Now there need be no deception on either side. Open your heart to me, little man. Who are you —Gordon Selsbury or Double Dan?"

"Anything!" The wail of the damned.

"Gordon Selsbury or Double Dan?" she demanded inexorably.

He threw out his hands.

"Double Dan," snarled Gordon.

Of the two alternative rôles, this seemed the more creditable.

CHAPTER XIII

He had never seen anybody as scared as Heloise was; that was the one clear impression which Gordon carried away from the interview. She, the self-possessed woman of the world, a soul, one superior to the lesser grades of humanity, seemed to have cowered and shrunk under the domination of Diana's baleful eye. Gordon sighed, tied his baize apron a little tighter round his waist, and wondered where Trenter kept his stock of plate powder. On the whole, it was good that Trenter was away, and that he was spared the sight of his master's humiliation. If indeed it was a humiliation to be thrust into an ill-lit pantry with instructions to clean the silver, and be ready at a moment's notice to make himself presentable. Gordon tried again and attacked a cream-jug half-heartedly. His hands were not designed for housework. Yet he would as soon have thought of cutting his throat with a fruit knife (half-a-dozen of which awaited his atten-

tion) as disobey Diana's imperious gesture which had sent him off to the pantry to clean silver.

He was not asleep; he had made absolutely certain of this; he was wide awake, in his shirt sleeves, a baize apron covering his detestable suit, and he was polishing a cream, or it may have been a milk jug. That fact being firmly and inevitably established, he had some basis for reasoning and wonder. Chief cause for wonder was why Diana kept him in the house at all, believing him to be Double Dan; why she did not send immediately for the police and have him taken off to the nearest lock-up. He was devoutly thankful that she hadn't! The second cause for wonder was what had happened to the remainder of the domestic staff? Eleanor he had not seen. There was no evidence that the cook was on the premises. Here again this fact provided him with a certain amount of satisfaction—but where were they? He was to learn.

Diana made her appearance at the door of the pantry and he stared at her open-mouthed. Around her dainty waist was a broad leather belt, and, hanging by two straps, was a pistol holster, from the opening of which protruded the black handle of a Browning.

"Do you know anything about potatoes?" she asked curtly.

Gordon was ashamed to discover that he knew nothing about potatoes, except that they were vegetables.

"Have you ever *peeled* potatoes?"

"I can't remember," he said. "When I was at school I think we used to peel potatoes——"

"I'm not interested in what happened at Borstal—that is the name of the juvenile convict establishment, isn't it? Put that milk-jug down and come into the kitchen."

He followed her meekly. There was no sign of the cook; Eleanor was invisible, and he learnt the reason.

"I've sent my servants away for a week-end holiday," she said. "I want no scandal attaching to my cousin's name. I will not even have it known that this attempt has been made to swindle him. You understand that you will not try to leave the house?"

"Yes," he nodded.

"Naturally, it is impossible that I should keep up day and night watching you," she said, "so I have asked a friend to come in and help me."

A gleam of hope showed in Gordon's eyes.

"A detective," she said impressively, "a Mr. Superbus—a name, I think with which you are well acquainted."

"That . . . that . . . ?" spluttered Gordon indignantly.

"That," she said.

A bell shrilled in the kitchen. She looked up at the indicator. The little disc which represented the front door was oscillating violently.

"There are the potatoes," she pointed to them.

Gordon saluted. He was once in the army and it seemed natural to salute.

No sooner had she gone than he decided upon his course of action. He was well enough acquainted with the house to know that there was a kitchen door and for this he made. It was locked; the key had been taken away; the windows of scullery and kitchen were heavily barred against burglars. Gordon returned to his potatoes with a sigh. He sighed easily in these hours.

Again the bell rang. Diana heard it as she unbuckled the strap of her revolver belt, and put away the weapon into the hall cupboard. She hesitated a second with her hand on the door-knob, and then the thunderous rat-tat forced her to action. She opened the door. The moment

had come. Before she saw the bearded gentleman she knew he was there.

"Three o'clock!" he cried exultantly, and threw out both his hands. "Three o'clock, my bride, my dove, my life!"

"Come in," said Diana practically.

He would have taken her in his arms, but she held him at a distance.

"The servants," she said and swiftly eluded his embracing arms.

"In here," she opened The Study door. "Guiseppi, you must behave—you really must. My uncle——"

"Your uncle!" He gazed at her ecstatically.

She nodded.

"In this house?"

She ought to have been warned by his fervour, but the immediate necessities of the moment threw her off her balance.

"Why, of course he's here," she said.

"Your uncle is here!" There was triumph in his tone, his wild eyes fixed her.

"Why . . . why yes, Guiseppi," she faltered and he closed his eyes in a rapt smile.

"Then the dream of my life is to be fulfilled. Your telephone—I may use it, yes?"

He was at the telephone before she could say yes or no. She heard him give a number, his hotel, and then:

"You will have my bags sent here at once, to Cheynel Gardens, yes? Two bags, do you not understand English? My grip, bags, send them to this place. What is the name, Cheynel? Yes, that is it, Cheynel Gardens, Number 61. You cannot mistake it. My pyjamas you will not forget. They are under my pillow."

"Guiseppi!" she gasped. "What are you doing? Wait! You can't stay here!"

"Yes, here, under your roof. The glory of it! It is wonderful, a fulfilment of dreams, oh my starry vision! Without your good uncle it was impossible. You have a new aunt? Ah, the poor Mrs. Tetherby! It was comical, to me tragic, yet this moment comical again!"

"But Guiseppi," she wailed, "you can't stay. My uncle doesn't like people staying in the house. . . ."

He patted her shoulder.

"We shall charm him. We shall overcome his objections! Tell me his hobby, I will speak about it. There is no subject under the sun on which I cannot speak."

This she believed.

"Your aunt! To me your aunt! Bring her at once that I may shake her hand and kiss her on both cheeks. The aunt of Diana! Oh divine relationship!"

In a dazed kind of way Diana realized that the Italian side of Mr. Dempsi had developed to an enormous and unbearable extent. He could not keep still for a moment. Now he was at the fireplace, examining the crossed oars.

"You have learnt to row, my little Diana? That is wonderful! We shall row together upon the stream of Time, drinking the waters of Lethe and forgetting the past."

In two strides he had reached her, gripping both her hands in his.

"Diana, do you realise how I have dreamt of all this, through the long nights in the bush, in the waste places of the Northern Territories, where I wandered seeking gold and forgetfulness and finding neither? In the silence of the native hut, broken by the little birds' twittering in the darkness, and no other sound but the sighing of the wind—your face was there! Your exquisite memorable features, the glory of your hair, your eyes that smiled and tormented . . ."

He broke off abruptly.

"Your uncle . . . produce him . . ."

Gordon had peeled his third potato when Diana staggered into the kitchen. They were big potatoes when he started to deal with them. They were very small when he had finished. It was difficult to know where the skin began and ended; he had cut deep to make sure.

At the sight of her tragic face he dropped his potato.

"Anything wrong?"

"Wrong? Everything's wrong!" she said bitterly. "I'm going to give you your chance. I don't like your name, Dan, and I've changed it. You're Isaac!"

"Who!" he twittered.

"You're Isaac, my uncle Isaac!"

He put down the knife, wiped his hands on his apron and went slowly across to her.

"I am not your uncle Isaac," he began.

"Take off *that!*" she pointed to the apron. "Put on your coat and come upstairs. Remember, you're uncle Isaac and that terrible female—where is she?"

"How the dickens do I know where she is?" asked the annoyed Gordon.

"Wait!"

Diana flew up the stairs to the top of the house and in the spare room where she had intended putting the hired man and wife, she found Heloise sitting disconsolately on the edge of the bed, a suspicious wetness about her eyes. When the door was unlocked and flung open, the woman jumped up.

"Now, see here, Mrs. Selsbury," she began in her high voice, "I don't know the law of this country but you've no right to lock me in——"

"Do you want me to send for the police?" asked Diana, calm but menacing.

"I tell you you're all wrong, Mrs. Selsbury," said Heloise with great earnestness. "You've made the biggest mistake of your life. That poor fish is your husband."

"I have no husband—fish, flesh, fowl or herring," said Diana. "I never had a husband," and then remembering, "I am a widow."

Heloise was momentarily staggered.

"You can forget all that has happened to-day," said Diana speaking a little wildly. "A visitor has come—he is staying in the house . . . an old friend of mine . . . in fact, I was once engaged to him until he died in the bush."

"Is he here?" asked the startled Heloise.

"He is here," nodded Diana, "and he is remaining. Obviously, I cannot allow him to stay unless I have a chaperone. You are," she spoke deliberately, "Aunt Lizzie."

Heloise could only look at her.

"You're Aunt Lizzie and your wretched criminal husband, or whatever he is (I can only hope for the best) is Uncle Isaac. Go right down into the kitchen and tell him."

"Let me get this right," said Heloise slowly. "I am Aunt Lizzie . . . you want me to be your Aunt Lizzie . . . and that poor child is to be . . . ?"

"Uncle Isaac."

"I haven't gotten it right yet," said Heloise, "this is a cinema lot . . . you're playing some-p'n," she had forgotten momentarily that she was a lady of fashion and culture. "I'm Aunt Lizzie . . ."

She sank under the burden that had been imposed upon her.

"You're all crazy, that's what. I'm an American citizen, or near American . . . Toronto, but I live so close that I could throw a stone across the border. And I'm Aunt Lizzie!"

CHAPTER XIV

GORDON was playing absently with potato peelings when she came in.

"You're Uncle Isaac!" she said in a strained, hazy fashion.

"Where have you been, Heloise?"

The sight of his companion in misfortune brought him with a jerk to normal. Heloise was real, something to cling to; he forgot his resentment in the joy of seeing something that anchored him to Gordon Selsbury.

"Say Gordon, that Jane . . . she's Diana, huh?"

He nodded.

"Your wife, you never told me that?"

"She is not my wife . . . she has no right here . . . if I gave you cause to think I was married it was because I wanted you to go. Don't you see what you've done? You've ruined me! If you had only kept away—if you had only kept away!" he moaned.

"She's your widow," she was very quiet and

restrained. He decided that she had lost her reason.

"Yes, if you like, she's my widow," he said soothingly. "Sit down . . . I will get you a glass of water."

"Diana!" said Heloise in wonder. "That's your little Australian girl . . . Gordon, was she a cop?"

"A what?"

"A headquarters woman! She's got the style. Come on."

"Where?"

"She wants us . . ." said Heloise listlessly. "What's the good of fighting, Gordon? We're entangled in the mesh of circumstance."

It was a favourite profundity of Heloise; he had heard her say it many times. But they were not entangled then.

Five minutes later.

A small brown-faced man was shaking Gordon by the hand, by both hands, by alternate hands. In the interval of shaking, he held hands.

"Your uncle . . . and so young! And yet, he is older than he seems! And this is Aunt Lizzie!"

He kissed the patient Heloise on both cheeks.

Gordon was a dumbfounded spectator. Who was this infernal little cad, he demanded—Diana had omitted an introduction.

After a while it came.

"This, Uncle Isaac, is Mr. Guiseppi Dempsi—you remember how often I have spoken of him."

Her steely glance was unnecessary. Gordon remembered.

"I thought he was dead." So intense were his feelings that his voice dropped to a deep base.

It startled even himself.

"But I am alive! Rejoice, Uncle Isaac! Your little Wopsy is alive! I have come back from the shades! A syren's sweet magic brought me across the world, yea, even through the shadows . . ."

He pointed with his whole hand to Diana and then.

"My bride!" he said tremendously.

Gordon looked from one to the other. "Dempsi . . . bride . . . bride Dempsi. . . ."

"Perfectly ridiculous," said Gordon and quailed under a fiendish glare from Diana.

But Mr. Dempsi was too happy to find anything in the interruption but a piece of rare good humour.

"We will have long talks, you and my uncle!" he said and beamed round on his hostess. "Tell me, little one, have I changed? Ah, but I was a boy then, a weak, vacillating ignorant boy. I did not realize that to win a woman she must be carried off her feet. To whine and wail for her, that is no good; to be diffident and timid—that is no good. To sigh at her feet bores her, to be humble arouses the greatest contempt . . . women desire in men the grand manner, biff, bang, boff!"

"Uncle has to go now to . . . to feed the chickens," said Diana hurriedly.

Mr. Guiseppi Dempsi must neither biff, bang nor boff at 61 Cheynel Gardens. Dismayed she realized how broken were the reeds on which she had leant. They also were to know. She came into the kitchen after them.

"You're no good, either of you," she was in despair. "I suppose you're good crooks, but that is because you haven't the brains to be anything else. You stood like wax figures from the Chamber of Horrors and did *nothing!*"

"What were we supposed to do?" Gordon was stung into enquiring. "If I'd done what I

wanted to do, I'd have thrown the little wop into the street! But you're master here. You won't accept a perfectly simple explanation——"

"Your perfectly simple explanation doesn't go with Aunt Lizzie," she stopped him in her most imperial manner. "You might have deceived me but for that—be sensible, man. I *know* you're Double Dan. I want to use you if I can—if I can't I'll send for the police. I'm expecting Mr. Superbus at any moment—you will be under his eye; try to conduct yourself as an uncle would."

Gordon writhed.

"How can I behave like an uncle when you're setting an infernal bottle-nosed enquiry agent to watch me?" demanded Gordon hotly. "It is no crime to be an uncle, my good girl! You can't say 'Watch that man, he's my Uncle Isaac!' By your standard of ethics, an uncle may be a suspicious circumstance, but in this country it isn't . . . what excuse can you give?"

Her lips curled.

"I can say that you are weak-minded," she said, cold-bloodedly, "and that is just what I am going to say!"

Gordon leant against the table for support.

"I'm not weak-minded," he protested.

They waited until the sound of Diana's footsteps had died away.

"This comes of trips to Ostend," said Mr. Selsbury with a catch in his voice.

"If you'd gone to Ostend that couldn't have happened," said Heloise fiercely. "Does it occur to you that my husband has followed us and is at this moment sitting on the doorstep waiting to free your poor spirit from this earthly bondage?"

Gordon passed his hand wearily over his forehead. He was in the depths of despondency.

"I don't care," he said. "I don't care about your husband. He's probably a sensible man to whom one could explain things. Diana is so infernally sure of herself that you can't argue with her."

Sitting on the edge of the table, she had lit a cigarette, and was sending blue, twisting rings of smoke into the air. She did not speak for a long time, and then only to break in upon Gordon's gloomy thoughts.

"My, I wish I was back home in my little apartment on a hundred 'n' thoity-ninth Street!" she quavered.

Mr. Selsbury was visibly surprised. He had never heard her say "thoity" before.

Diana had come to feel unaccountably fagged. There was no adequate reason, for as a rule she was tireless; but the succession of demands upon her nervous energy was telling. She had to watch for tradesmen, she had to answer the door; a dozen times she was called from The Study to interview callers of all kinds who, obeying the large notice she had hand-printed and stuck on the kitchen door, "Please come to the main entrance: this door is not in use," fed her with packages of grocery, baskets of meat, trays of fish. The amount of food that was consumed at No. 61 was appalling; she, at any rate, was appalled.

Toward evening, when Dempsi was fidgetting for the dinner she had forgotten to order, a man called. He was poorly dressed, unsavoury of appearance. His thin, yellow face was unshaven and he carried his head slightly askew. The sight of Diana took him aback for a moment.

"Good evening, miss," he said, touching his cap. "I've called for the money."

"Whose money?" she asked, surprised.

"Mine: I cleaned the windows yesterday."

Then she recalled him. Heloise had complained that the man was "nosing round The Study," and expressed doubts about his honesty and bona fides.

"Name of Stark, miss," he said encouragingly.

"I remember." She went in search of her bag.

When she came back, he was examining the lock of the door with professional interest. He was once a lock-maker, he offered the excuse for his curiosity. If Diana had not been wearing very soft-soled boots, the excuse would have been unnecessary.

"Mr. Selsbury not in, miss?" as she counted the money in his hand.

"No," she said shortly.

"Mr. Trenter in, miss?"

"No." Her eyes gleamed.

"Will Mr. Selsbury be away long—I wanted to see him about a job?"

"I don't know when he will be back," she said. "There are several men in the house: would you like to see one?"

His expression changed.

"No, thank you, miss."

She closed the door on him and wondered when the Watch Dog would arrive.

There was still a lot of money in the safe. Those unaware of her obligations to Mr. Dempsi might imagine there was more.

Dempsi had wandered out of the room when she came in, and she went swiftly to the safe. It was one of those old-fashioned receptables that had, in addition to the combination, a further lock operated by a key. Gordon had once told her that the key was never used; he had once mislaid it and had to summon experts to open the door. She searched his writing-table, pulling out drawers (she opened them all without difficulty) and at last, in a small envelope inscribed gratuitously "Key," she found what she sought.

"Thank goodness!" said Diana.

A turn of her wrist and the safe was secure even against those who by cunning or violence had obtained the code word.

Mr. Julius Superbus came importantly, descending from a taxicab and drawing out after him a large tin box, mottled red and black. He produced, also from the interior of the cab, a large scrap-book fastened about with a broad green canvas strap. He also delivered from the cab a daring golf cap. These he deposited on the sidewalk, paid the taximan his fare, climbing in-

side to verify what had seemed to be a preposterous statement of claim, and donated the driver sixpence. Diana in the note she had scrawled had added a P.S. "Spare no expense."

Gathering his belongings under both arms, he went up the steps, stooped and pressed the bell with his nose, a clever little device that had once come to him as an inspiration and which in itself advertised his originality.

Diana answered the door.

"You sent for me," said Julius simply. "I have come."

She was obviously relieved to see him, and piloted him into the dining-room.

"Mr. Superbus, I am going to make great demands upon you, and I'm sure I shall not ask in vain. I am in the greatest trouble."

He inclined his head.

"Have you searched all your clothes?" he asked quickly. "You've lost something—I know this by, so to speak, a method of my own. It's natural to suspect servants—but do they do it, ma'am? Not once in fifty times——"

"I've lost nothing. Mr. Superbus, my uncle is here——"

She was doubtful as to how she should go on.

Should she take him entirely into her confidence? A wild idea, but not without its advantage.

"Relations," the Roman pronounced, "are best apart. They come, they borrow money, they eat you out of house and home, and when they go, they haven't a good word for you. Uncles especially. Leave him to me, ma'am; I'll put the case to him man to man. He'll be out of this house . . ." he looked at his watch—"in five minutes."

She enlightened him briefly: her uncle was a welcome visitor; a nice man, very much like Mr. Selsbury in appearance and as young. Only . . . she tapped her forehead. Mr. Superbus understood.

"Tact," he said, "tact and humour. Let 'em think they're havin' their way and then the iron hand in the velvet glove—an expression I invented myself," he appended modestly. "Leave him to me. You couldn't come to anybody better than me, ma'am. We've had several lunatics in our family"—Diana stepped back a pace—"and his good lady is here?"

"Aunt Lizzie."

"That makes it a *little* awkward," regretted Superbus, "owing to the difficulty of watching

him when he's asleep. Unless Aunt Lizzie would mind? I am a family man."

"She might object," said Diana. "No, I don't think that you need do that. If you can keep a general eye on him. He must not leave the house on any excuse."

Mr. Superbus smiled.

"You needn't worry about that, ma'am," he said.

There followed more instructions and warnings. Diana flew into The Study to pacify a distracted Dempsi, whose urgent voice had interrupted her twice during the interview with the detective.

Mr. Superbus went into the kitchen thoughtfully. He saw no resemblance between Gordon Selsbury and his uncle. He noted that in Aunt Lizzie's face was an expression of uneasiness.

"Good afternoon," he said. "My name's Smith."

Gordon pointed to the door.

"Go out and change it," he said.

Mr. Superbus was amused.

"I thought I'd pop down and have a look at you, Uncle Isaac," he said, and bowed to the lady, "and Aunt Lizzie." He radiated compassion.

"Get out!" roared Gordon, red of face. "Go

back to the lady who employs you and tell her that I give her ten minutes to hand me my keys and kick her infernal Dempsi out of the house!"

"What's the good?" It was Heloise who spoke. "If you make a fuss you'll be seeing the judge on Monday."

"I don't care!" Gordon was toeing the limit. "I simply don't care. I'm the master of this house and I will assert myself."

"Say, Gor-don! What am I—one of the extras? Ain't I got any say in this? You don't care! Well, I'm certainly glad you're that way—it's grand. But I allowed myself to be trapped by a she-octopus and I'll find another way of getting out than taking the short trail to the hutch. And the only way out is to behave."

Mr. Superbus agreed. He was not unprepared for the claim that Gordon was master of the house: against this strange hallucination on the part of Uncle Isaac that he was his own nephew, Diana had warned him.

"You're a good lad and I'm a good lad," he murmured. "We're all good lads together."

He winked at Heloise. Susceptible to such signals, Heloise winked back.

It was maddening—to what degree, Gordon

learnt painfully. Mr. Superbus was so kind and so helpful and so tolerant. Gordon went into his pantry and searched for a large, razor-sharp carving knife. There are some things no man can endure—kindness is one of them.

CHAPTER XV

"LIFE," said Mr. Dempsi, stretching the toes of his small feet to the fire with a luxurious intake of breath, "is a beautiful thing. From the utter depths of loveless despair to the sublime accomplishment of heart's desire—what a transition, my own!"

"Mr. Dempsi—" began Diana.

"Wopsy," he murmured reproachfully.

"Well—Wopsy. I have allowed you to stay because I wanted a quiet talk with you. A quiet talk," she stressed the qualification as he reached out for a hand that was not there.

"Silence is so wonderful." He turned his languishing eyes upon her. "Silence and thought and The Woman."

But Diana had her piece to say, carefully prepared and rehearsed in the solitude of her room.

"Five years ago you were good enough to ask me to marry you. I refused. People say that young girls are brainless—the fact that I declined the honour you offered is proof to the contrary.

What I felt then, I feel now. My heart is in the grave!"

"*My* grave." His smile was melancholy but complacent.

"Don't be silly. You are alive, I'm sorry—I mean I should be sorry if you weren't. I had a lover—my heart went out to him, Wopsy,"—her voice trembled, she thought there were tears in his sympathetic eyes, "but he passed."

"Ran away from you?" Mr. Dempsi sat up.

"When I say 'passed' "—there was more than a trace of acid in Diana's voice—"I mean . . . to the Great Beyond."

"Pegged out?" Dempsi shrugged. "These things happen. Once I loved a girl—oh, Diana, such a girl amongst girls! Tall, divinely fair, gracious in every look and movement. She also passed—to the Great Beyond."

"She died?" whispered Diana.

"She went on to the stage—in America," said Dempsi. "She was dead to me. I cut her out of my heart. I could have killed myself, but I said: 'Wopsy, have you forgotten your little Diana—your first, your only love?' With a courage that I have often admired, I forgot her. She is now the greatest screen vamp in Hollywood. I see

her frequently without a tremor. Such things happen."

Diana was unmoved, though a little discouraged.

"My love will never be forgotten," she gulped. "Wopsy, you see how impossible it is—did you get the money?"

"The money—you sent it to me? But, Diana, how foolish!"

"I sent it by cheque," she said.

He sank back again in his chair.

"You are a foolish little one. Money!" He laughed cruelly. "How you Anglo-Saxons worship money! To men of my temperament . . . !" He snapped his fingers. "As to your unfaithfulness to the great ideal I provided, your heartless disregard for my memory, I forgive you. You were only a child—you could not be expected to cherish the memory of the man who died for you. That is past. We belong to the Day—tomorrow, Monday, Tuesday we shall be married."

"What are we doing on Wednesday?" she asked. "Forgive me for looking so far ahead."

For a second he was disconcerted, uneasy: that he betrayed in his laughter.

"My dear little Diana, how droll you are——"

"Listen, Dempsi or Wopsy, as the case may be—you are returning to your hotel to-morrow. We are not getting married on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. Shall I tell you why? I see that you are interested. Because I don't want to marry you."

His face darkened.

"This is Uncle Isaac!" he said between his teeth. "The influence of that man is diabolical! All my life I have been thwarted by aunts and uncles. He shall answer to me—Guiseppi Dempsi!"

He flung out of his chair, took two strides toward the door, when she caught his arms desperately.

"Let me go," he stormed.

"If you leave this room I will telephone for the police!"

The tension relaxed.

"For me—the police for me!" He covered his face in his hands and his shoulders heaved convulsively. Diana felt no regrets.

"And she of whom I dreamt threatens me. Let me die!"

Diana let him. At the end of three minutes he was still alive.

"Mr. Dempsi, dry your eyes."

Like a faithful but heart-broken hound, he obeyed.

"You may stay here to-night," she said; "your bedroom is at the top of the stairs. I hope you sleep well. If you want anything, ring the bell. Good-night."

He turned wearily toward the door.

"This is not Diana."

His dejection would have touched a heart of stone. Diana was unmoved. She heard his door close, went silently up the stairs and slipped a key into the lock. He heard, too late, the grating of steel against steel. Before he could reach the door the lock snapped.

"Who is that—who has locked the door? Open it at once."

"It is I," said Diana in a low voice.

"But, Diana, this is extraordinary!"

"I do it for your own protection," she whispered through the keyhole. "Uncle Isaac does not like you—and *he is armed.*"

A silence.

"But this is dangerous! If there is a fire——"

"Use the extinguisher!" she hissed. "It is hanging in the wardrobe."

She was tired, aching in every limb, immensely lonely. Oh, for the comforting presence of Gordon! Or even Eleanor, at that moment sitting in agitated conference with Mrs. Magglesark, discussing the strange behaviour of mistresses in general and Australian mistresses in particular.

Happily there was Mr. Superbus.

The faint sound of music came up from the servants' hall as she descended the stairs. Mr. Superbus was playing a mouth-organ softly, almost musically. Aunt Lizzie sat before the kitchen fire, chin in hand. Uncle Isaac leant against the kitchen dresser, glowering at the musician. The harmonies were confirmed as she opened the door.

"Had a pleasant evening?" she asked.

"I've had nothing to eat but bread and cheese," said Gordon. "This little joke of yours is going too far, Diana."

She looked at him aghast.

"We didn't have any dinner!" she said in dismay, tempered with the satisfaction that Dempsi was at that moment starving in his locked room. "I haven't even had bread and cheese—it is time for you to go to bed."

"I'll go when I please," said Gordon loudly.

Mr. Superbus shook his head reprovingly.

"Naughty, naughty!" he chided. "That's not like my Uncle Isaac. And he's been such a good boy, ma'am, singing as gay as a lark."

Gordon blushed.

"I didn't sing, you jackass!" he growled.

"Didn't he sing, Aunt Lizzie?"

She shrugged indifferent shoulders.

"Well, if he didn't sing he 'ummed," insisted Mr. Superbus.

His repertoire on the mouth-organ included the Eton Boating Song—Gordon was an old Etonian. Doubtless he had 'ummed: no Etonian could resist the lilt of it.

"To bed," said Diana curtly.

Swinging her keys, she had the appearance of a jailer.

"You will regret this," said Gordon between his teeth. "I can bring a thousand people to identify me."

"And how many to identify Aunt Lizzie?" asked Diana with a curl of her lips.

Gordon had no answer. She had the exasperating habit of shutting every door in his face,

dispelling every wild vision of liberty that hope conjured to shape.

Heloise was not silenced.

"Why, that's not going to be difficult," she drawled. "I'm Mrs. van Oynne of 71 Clarence Gate Gardens."

"Very good," nodded Diana. "You are at liberty to telephone to the police and allow them to identify you. I'll tell them that by an error I have mistaken you for Double Dan's—what is the word? partners? They will put things right."

Heloise got up.

"I was never strong for fighting," she said. "I'm going to bed."

Diana led the way, Gordon came after, Mr. Superbus followed, emitting soft tuning noises from his mouth-organ. Were it in his repertoire, Gordon would have selected "The Death of Asa" as an appropriate accompaniment to that solemn march. He imagined himself a malefactor on his way to execution. Diana had the air of hangman and private torturer.

"Good-night," he said mechanically, and stopped at the door of his room.

"Not in there!" Her loud whisper was threatening. He followed to the floor above.

The room chosen was that in which Diana said she intended sleeping the man and wife who were to be engaged for the autumn cleaning. Heloise went in—she knew the room.

"Good-night," she said.

"You have forgotten something," said Diana.

"If you think I'm going to kiss you, there's a surprise coming to you, girl," said Heloise, and tried to shut the door.

"Your husband," said Diana primitively.

The door slammed, Diana heard a chair dragged across the room, and guessed that the back of it was being propped under the handle. Gordon's throat went dry.

"You have quarrelled?" said Diana. "Or perhaps you don't. . . ."

"I don't!"

The voice came from his stomach—he had never suspected such a range of sound in himself.

"That's very awkward." She tapped her lips with a key. "You'll have to go into the spare room. Come down."

The spare room was at the far end of the passage and the bed had not been made up.

"There are the blankets," said Diana and pointed. "To-morrow I will find sheets for

you. The bed is more comfortable than any you'll find at the police station."

She locked the door on him.

The window was open, but there was no method of reaching safety. Here the wall dropped sheerly to the bottom of the area, and if you missed the area there was a row of sharp, spiked railings. Gordon decided to go to bed. For an hour he tossed from side to side, his nerves on edge, sleep farther from him than ever. There might be a spare key to the room in one of the drawers. He searched diligently, but without success. Then he tried the door. From somewhere outside came the sound of a knife-cleaner working eccentrically. Or it may have been the noise of a carpet-sweeper being pushed across the floor by one who had no conception of rhythm. As he turned the handle, the noise ceased and a voice said:

"Sleep well, Uncle Isaac."

Mr. Superbus, that faithful watch dog, was sleeping on the mat.

CHAPTER XVI

DIANA stirred uneasily in her sleep and woke. There was no sound but the distant snore of Mr. Superbus, but she had an uncanny instinct that all was not well. Slipping out of bed, she pulled on her dressing-gown and looked out of the window. She saw a figure on the sidewalk. A man, slight of build, round-shouldered. She saw him clearly in the light of the street standard which was immediately opposite the house. She guessed his face rather than saw it, and wondered where she had seen him before. Stark, the window-cleaner! Now she knew him. As she looked, he stood back quickly, bringing himself against the railings. Craning her neck, she saw a shadowy policeman slowly passing the end of the street. He reached the opposite corner and stopped, came a few steps down Cheynel Gardens and stopped again. There was the flare of a match. It was the hour when policemen produce surreptitious pipes in defiance of all regulations. The figure against the railings remained motionless.

"What do you want?" demanded Diana.

Mr. Stark looked up.

"Nothing, lady. I can't sleep," he stammered.

"See the policeman: he'll nurse you," said Diana.

He disappeared up the passage leading to the courtyard, but presently he came back and walked boldly back to the main street. Diana saw the smoking policeman cross the road. There was a brief conversation and Mr. Stark disappeared. Diana thought she had seen the policeman's hands moving scientifically over the loafer's body.

She was thoroughly awake now. The hour was 3.15. She took up her handbag, unlocked and opened her door and listened. The watchful Julius was awake instantly.

"It is only I, Mr. Superbus," she said, relieved to find him so alert. "I am afraid you're having a very uncomfortable time."

"No, miss: I seldom sleep. Napoleon was that way by all accounts. Want anything, ma'am?"

"I'm going to make myself a cup of tea," she said, and went down the gloomy stairs to the kitchen.

She was very hungry—she made tea, found a tinful of biscuits and called her protector in a whisper to share the feast.

"We might as well have some light," she said, and lit the hall lamp. "Come in, Mr. Superbus."

The door of The Study did not yield to her pressure, and she frowned.

"I'm sure I did not lock this door," she said, and found the pass-key in her bag. The door was bolted on the inside!

"Wait here whilst I dress," she said.

The eyes of Julius Superbus bulged. Excitement toned his complexion from petunia to old gold. He was not nervous; he was not frightened. Danger made him go pale. Mark Antony was that way.

She was down again in an incredibly short space of time, took the revolver belt from the hall cupboard and fixed it about her waist. Mr. Superbus saw the gun in her hand and felt more comfortable.

"Open the door, please."

There was a faint rustle of movement on the other side of the door. A not so faint click as if lights were being extinguished.

"Guard the back of the house," she said in a low voice. "He will probably escape over the wall. Take no risks—strike him down at once. He may be armed!"

Mr. Superbus did not move. He was rooted to the spot, as they say.

"What about getting a policeman?" he asked hollowly.

She shook her head.

"I don't want the police here. Do as I tell you, please."

Mr. Superbus tried to lift a foot and winced; his rheumatism had "come on" again.

"I won't leave you here by yourself," he said unsteadily; "it would be cowardly, leaving a lady by herself."

From the hall there was one entrance to The Study. You might reach it, however, through the small ante-room which Gordon used as a book store. He refused to dignify the place with the description of "library."

"Stay here," she whispered, and sped along the dark passage.

The door was unlocked, the smell of books came to her in the darkness, and she stepped stealthily into the room, pistol in hand.

The second door into The Study opened. The big room was in darkness except for the faint light of the painted window.

"Hands up!" she called. "I see you!"

The light control was at the other end of the room—she felt cautiously forward. She had taken a few steps when the door into the hall jerked open and a figure darted through, slamming the door. . . .

Superbus would have him, she thought exultantly as she ran in pursuit. But there was no sound of struggle, and when she flew into the hall it was empty.

"Mr. Superbus!" she called.

"Here, ma'am." He came out of The Study behind her. "I follered you," he said; "it wasn't right to let a lady take risks. Did you see him?"

"Oh, why didn't you do as I told you?" she wailed.

"My duty was to foller you." Julius was dogged. "It was safer."

Which was true.

She put on all the lights of The Study. Nothing apparently had been disturbed except——

She had left the pointer of the combination on the letter "X." It was now on "A."

"Bring in the tea," she said, and continued her inspection.

Mr. Superbus returned with the tray she had filled.

"What we want are cloos," he said gently, so gently that she did not hear him aright.

"The wine cellars are closed. I don't want the bother of unlocking them—and I never drink."

"Cloos," said Julius loudly.

"Oh! I thought you said . . . well, find some."

Bent double, he prowled round the room. Diana ate biscuits ravenously.

"Somebody has been here," he pointed to the big chair near the fireplace. "Look at that cushion—there's the mark of a head."

"Mine," she was laconic, a trifle unkind. "Look for cigar-ash, my dear Watson!"

He eyed her with a certain amount of suspicion which was largely justified.

"Come and eat," she said, and dropped the biscuit tin within reach. "Now how on earth did he get out?"

"Who?"

"Doub—Uncle Isaac." She corrected her error instantly.

Julius could afford to smile.

"He didn't get out. I've never left my post, ma'am. My own theory is that it was a burglar."

"How did he leave the house?" she asked. "The front door is still chained and bolted. He must still be in the house."

"Don't say that, miss—ma'am," begged Julius nervously. "If he was in this house I wouldn't be responsible for myself. I go mad when I see burglars—that's why the doctor ordered me to keep away from 'em."

"He's in the house; probably hiding in the kitchen. Have some biscuits; when I've finished my tea we'll go look for him."

Julius had no appetite.

"This is a case for the regular police," he said earnestly. "They're paid for it, anyway. The Government supports their widows. Besides," unselfishly, "they get promotion for capturing burglars. I believe in doing somebody a good turn whenever I can. Shall I get a copper?"

She motioned him to remain.

"Stay here: I will look."

He refused to stay. His place was by her side and a little behind her. He liked the way she

handled that Browning. She seemed the kind of woman who would stand no nonsense.

The kitchen drew blank.

"I never thought he was here," she said. "No, it was Uncle Isaac."

Mr. Superbus, back in The Study, propounded a startling theory.

"There's such things as subterranean passages," he said. "I've seen 'em. You push back a panel and there's a flight of stairs, leading to an underground vault. You touch a spring——"

"There are no springs to be touched at 61 Cheynel Gardens," she said, "and no panels, and no underground vaults except the cellar where the furnace is. Go down and satisfy yourself."

Mr. Superbus countered graciously that her word was sufficient.

The hour was a quarter after four o'clock. Mr. Superbus lit the fire, going very slowly down to the kitchen to find the kindling wood, and coming very swiftly up again. His teeth were chattering: it was very chilly in the kitchen, he said.

"There was nothing to hurt you in the kitchen," she said.

Julius was amused.

"Hurt *me?* I'd like to see the thing that tried it on! I don't know what fear is, ma'am. All our family is that way. My brother Augustus walks through a churchyard every night from the Duchesses' Arms——"

"Does she know him so well—how odd!" she said.

"It's the name of an inn, ma'am. He's married. Yes, he walks through the churchyard and he's never seen anything. His wife—she's got a bitter tongue—says that she's not surprised. He can't see her by the time he gets home. My sister Agrippa is as brave as a lion —it runs in the family. What's that!"

He half rose. From the hall came the sound of stealthy footsteps.

"Go out and see."

She reached for the gun.

Mr. Superbus went reluctantly, making a wide detour. You can as easily see into the hall from the far side of the room as from the doorway. She saw him creep slowly onward until he was in a position, by stretching his neck, to command a view of the hall.

"Don't shoot, ma'am," he quavered; "it's Aunt!"

Heloise advanced into the room, a scowl on her face.

"What's the trouble?" she demanded. "I heard somebody running upstairs."

Her eyes fell on the biscuit tin. She reached for a handful, sat down before the unlit fire and munched moodily.

"There's a cat and canary feeling about this house," she said. "I wish I was home!"

Diana was impressed by the abysmal dejection of the woman.

"Get another cup and saucer, Mr. Superbus," she said. "Aunt Lizzie would like some tea."

Julius had gone down on his knees before the fireplace, in that attitude resembling a priest of some mystic sect of fire-worshippers. Straightening his back, he looked up anxiously.

"You will find a cup and saucer on the servery at the end of the passage," said Diana. "You need not go down to the kitchen."

Julius rose with relief.

"*I* don't mind the kitchen," he said untruly.

It was Heloise who lit the fire and crouched above it, folded arms on knees, staring down at the little banners of flame. It seemed to her

that a million years had passed since she had discussed anybody's soul. Watching her, Diana had a view of a delicately moulded cheek and the tip of a well-shaped nose, and experienced an inexplicable wave of compassion toward the woman.

"What is Double Dan to you?" she asked.

Heloise shrugged her left shoulder.

"Are you married to him?"

Mrs. van Oynne was sensitive to atmosphere. No English barometer (the most restless of all scientific instruments except perhaps a Japanese seismograph) was quite as responsive to the emotions of others as was the little detector which registered sympathy in the nimble brain of Heloise.

"Some day I will tell you," she said, in a tone of deepest melancholy, "but not now—not now!"

She drew a long, shivering sigh.

"I don't suppose you're following this kind of life for the fun of it," Diana went on, her heart softening toward her unwilling guest.

"You've said it!" Heloise nodded slowly.

"If I could do anything—" began Diana.

Mr. Superbus arrived with the extra cup and

saucer, and confidences were temporarily sidetracked.

"Sleep well, Aunt Lizzie?" asked Julius, drinking audibly.

She shook her head.

"No, I can't sleep in strange beds. Besides, I've got trouble—big trouble. People can't sleep when they're in trouble."

"Ah!" said Julius wisely. "My theory is that you *have* slept."

She looked round at him over her shoulder.

"Where do you get that theory? Don't you think I know whether I slept or not, you poor . . . Mr. Superbus?"

"No," said Julius calmly; "there's one thing nobody knows—you can never know that you're asleep. You're a bit of a sonombulist?" he asked with elaborate carelessness.

"How's that?"

"Sonombulist—walk in your sleep. I got an idea I saw you about one o'clock?"

She turned her face away to the contemplation of the fire.

"Got ideas too? That mind of yours is surely active. If I thought you'd seen me at one

o'clock, why, I'd die right here at this very minute. I was taking off—you married?"

Julius, with some complacence, confessed that he was.

"Well, I guess I can discuss corsets without offending against Public Morality. You didn't see me at one o'clock—I'd be sorry to think you had."

Julius was embarrassed but not completely discouraged.

"Maybe it was three o'clock—I saw somebody coming downstairs. Ha ha, Aunt Lizzie, I saw you!"

He lifted a roguish finger.

"You're nutty," she said tersely, yawned and got up. "I guess I could sleep now. And I'm going to hang a stocking over the keyhole of my door." She directed this remark at Mr. Superbus and he choked indignantly at the base insinuation.

"Did you see her?" asked Diana after Heloise had gone.

"No, ma'am, I didn't," admitted Julius. "You can often get people to confess that way. It's called the Third Decree in America. I've tried

it myself. We had a charwoman help once who used to pinch my tobacco for her husband. I tried it on her—and other cases."

"You think it was Aunt Lizzie that was in the room?"

"Certain!" said Julius. "Notice how quiet she walks? That's a bad sign——"

"Notice how she reeks of Origon?" mimicked Diana.

"I didn't see her reeking," admitted Mr. Superbus, confused.

"I wonder you didn't—those heavy perfumes are almost visible. And there was no scent of Origon in the room—no fresh scent, anyway."

It was still dark when she drew up the blind and looked out. She felt very wide awake without knowing exactly in what manner her activity might be best employed.

"Take this key, go up into Uncle Isaac's room, open the door quietly and see if he is there. And then get out—quick!"

Julius did not like that word "quick!" Climbing the stairs leisurely, he listened at the door of Uncle Isaac's room. There was no sound. Which was satisfactory. On the other hand, the

very stillness might be ominous. Mad people are notoriously cunning. He remembered gruesome stories he had heard of cat-footed maniacs who had crept up behind their guards and cut their throats with pieces of old iron secretly sharpened.

Julius Superbus drew a long breath. The blood of his Cæsarian ancestors ran a little coldly; the pumping station under his left-hand waistcoat pocket increased its thump noisily. Again he listened. If Uncle Isaac was asleep, he would make no noise. Therefore, if there was no sound, he must be asleep. He went downstairs again.

"Sleeping like an innocent child," he reported, "one 'and under his cheek an' a sort of smile on his face."

She took the key from his hand and looked at it.

"You went in?"

"Right in," said Julius, sunning his back at the fire. "Put on the light, had a good look around."

She looked at the flat steel in her hand.

"I only asked you," she said, "because I gave you the key of The Study by mistake."

Julius was a man of infinite resource.

"I've got a way of opening doors that's known only to three people in the world."

"Come up with me," she said, rising. "I've got a way too—I use the right key."

He walked behind her, temporarily at a disadvantage.

She opened the door of Gordon's prison quickly and snapped on the light.

The room was empty.

CHAPTER XVII

KNOTTED to the bedstead was a rope. It was of amateur make, being three strips of blanket plaited together, and the rope led through the open window.

Diana looked down. The end of the rope dangled less than six feet from the window-sill. He must have dropped twenty feet to the stone flags below.

"That's funny," said Superbus, game to the last. "When I looked in——"

"Let us keep to facts," begged Diana, her youthful brows wrinkled. "What is the use of a rope if it only falls him a few feet from the sill —and why didn't he pull the bed to the window?"

She pulled the bed herself—it moved easily. The weight of a man would have drawn it across the floor.

Thoughtfully she took stock of the apartment. In one corner stood a long, mirror-fronted wardrobe. Drawing her Browning, she pulled open the door.

"Come out, please," she said coldly.

Gordon stepped forth with some dignity.

Standing in the doorway, Mr. Superbus witnessed the astonishing spectacle and shook his head reproachfully.

"Uncle Isaac, Uncle Isaac!" he said reprovingly. "I never thought you'd play a trick like that on an old friend!"

"Will you kindly tell me why you destroyed my bed linen?" asked Diana, and her cool claim to the ownership of anything in the house aroused Gordon to fury.

"Your bed linen is my bed linen!" he spluttered.

She raised her hand.

"We will not go into that matter, Uncle Isaac," she said with freezing politeness. "Will you be kind enough to draw in the blanket and close the window? It will be light soon, and I have no wish to give the milkman a topic for discussion. I have my cousin's interests to guard."

"Send for Bobbie," said Gordon, suddenly quiet. "I don't think he will have any doubt as to who I am."

"If by 'Bobbie' you mean Mr. Robert Selsbury," said Diana, "I've already telephoned to him. He is out of town—probably decoyed away by your agents."

Gordon was stricken to silence. The last avenue of escape was closed.

"Very well," he said. "I promise you I will give you no further trouble."

He pulled in the rope, let down the window and drew the blinds.

"Now, if you don't mind," he said, "I would like to go to sleep. I have been up the whole of the night."

She nodded.

"You may sleep, but Mr. Superbus will sit in this room. I will lock the door on you both——"

"Personally, I prefer sitting outside," said Mr. Superbus hastily. "I should like a smoke."

"You will remain," said Diana with firmness.

"If he does, I'll chuck him out of the window," said Gordon savagely.

Mr. Superbus backed from the room.

"He'll be all right, ma'am—miss," he said. "Trust old Uncle Isaac."

Diana knew that it was useless to insist. She shut the door on her captive and went down to The Study, being confident that he would make no further attempt at escape.

She must get in touch with Bobbie, must even risk his annoyance at being dragged from his bed

at that unearthly hour. She took up the telephone and put through a call. It was answered with surprising rapidity. The voice of an unknown man spoke: she guessed it was Bobbie's servant.

"It is Miss Ford speaking. Can I speak to Mr. Selsbury?"

"He hasn't been home all night, miss. I've been sitting up for him. He said he might get into London at daybreak."

"Where is he?" she asked.

"He's gone to Ostend, miss. He telephoned me from Dover."

The news was unexpected and a little alarming.

"Has he gone alone?" she asked.

"To the best of my knowledge and belief, miss," said Bobbie's man, tactfully, diplomatically and legally.

Diana hung up the receiver. Had they lured Bobbie, she wondered?

CHAPTER XVIII

Bobbie Selsbury had gone to Victoria to rescue his brother at the eleventh hour from a situation which could be mildly described as dangerous. He had searched one Continental train from end to end, and was half way through another when the guard's whistle sounded, and he was faced with the alternatives of leaving his search incomplete or going on to Dover. He decided upon the latter course, continuing his inspection of the compartments, roving Pullman cars, peeping in upon indignant honeymoon couples, without discovering the object of his search. At Dover he discovered that there had been a relief train leave Victoria at a quarter to eleven; the passengers were already on the steamer. Gordon may have come by that, he thought, and made his decision.

He had no passport, but most of the restrictions affecting Continental travel, especially travel to Belgium, had been removed, and he was able to convince the passport officer at the barrier that

his business was of such urgency, and his identity so well established, that a little licence might be extended to him; and, on the promise that he would return after leaving the ship, he was allowed to pass to the quayside.

He stopped only to get a call through to London, and, by great good luck, found the Dover-London wire disengaged. The boat was crowded, and he was no sooner on board than he saw how impossible it was to make sure that Gordon was not on the boat by a search whilst the ship was in port. The *Princess Juliana* carried Bobbie to sea. He arrived at Ostend at four o'clock in the afternoon, having satisfied himself that, although there were many suspicious characters on the ship, Gordon and Mrs. van Oynne were not two of them.

He spent two hours seeking the British Vice-Consul and persuading that gentleman to give him the necessary certificate to be readmitted, and to placate the passport officer on the other side, who had already been notified of his unauthorized departure.

Very few of the Ostend hotels were open, but Bobbie made a tour of all, examining their visitors' books. Gordon was not in Ostend. That

was a relief. He might have changed his mind at the last moment and gone to Paris, but that was unlikely. Bobbie believed his brother, though he imposed the limit of strain upon his credulity.

He returned to Dover by the night boat, and came in the grey dawn to the port, where he was held for two hours by the outraged passport authorities, missing the boat train and finally catching a slow train from the town station. He arrived in London at ten, unshaven, weary and irritable, and he did then what he might well have done at first—he drove straight to Scotland Yard, and, fortune favouring him, found Inspector Carslake in his room. Carslake and he had been in France together, and for twelve months had worked side by side in the Intelligence Bureau, where enemy regiments were identified and their positions plotted, by methods which would have puzzled cleverer people than my dear Watson.

As briefly as possible Bobbie told his story, and the inspector listened with unusual interest.

"It's curious you should come to me. I have charge of the Double Dan cases, and I must say that this looks like a typical coup of his."

"Gordon isn't an easy man to impersonate,"

warned Bobbie, "though I told him he was when I was trying to scare him."

"Anybody is easy to Double Dan," said Carslake at once. "Tall, short, thin or fat. He's a specialist—the only man at the game as far as I know. You didn't see the woman, Mrs. van Oynne?"

Bobbie shook his head.

"Do you know where she lives?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"He will do nothing till Monday," said Carslake thoughtfully. "Dan only works in banking hours, but when he does work he moves! I take off my hat to Dan—he's clever."

"Who is he?"

"A man named Throgood. He used to be an actor—I believe he's played opposite some of the best people in America. He was the English dude type. He himself is English or Welsh. His partner is an American or a Canadian, and an ex-chorus girl. Maybe it's the same—rather slight, short, with golden hair, blue eyes?"

Bobbie shook his head.

"Doesn't sound like Mrs. van Oynne," he said, hope dawning in his breast. "Perhaps I'm mistaken. You're sure?"

Carslake nodded.

"We trailed her to Paris and missed her. I shouldn't think he'd be working again for a very long time. He likes to allow the excitement to die down, and I shouldn't think that he'd take on a new partner; they require very careful training." He chuckled. "Double Dan's getting on the nerves of some of your commercial people," he said, "but I don't think I should worry very much about him. Anyway, I'll come along and see you on Monday."

Bobbie went home, feeling happier than he had been for the past twenty-four hours.

CHAPTER XIX

His servant had news for him.

"Miss Ford rang you up this morning, sir."

"Oh, what had she to say?" Bobbie turned, lather brush in hand.

"She only asked if you were at home."

"What time was this?"

"About five o'clock, sir."

"Five o'clock! You graven image, why didn't you tell me?"

Lathered as he was, he dashed to the telephone and got through to Diana.

"Is that you, Bobbie? Can I see you to-day?"

"I'll come at once."

There was a silence at the other end of the wire.

"I don't think you need come at once," said Diana. "Just call in—don't be surprised if you find somebody here you've heard me speak about."

"Not Dempsi?" he asked, astonished.

"Yes, he is . . . staying for a day or two. I'll explain when you come."

Bobbie whistled softly.

He lunched in the gloomy solitude of his club (it was Sunday, the day on which all clubs are at their worst) and early in the afternoon strolled round to Cheynel Gardens. The door was opened by a stage butler. Bobbie looked fascinated at the glittering display of shirt-front and the ill-fitting dress suit, several times too small for its wearer.

"Mrs. Ford is in The Study," said the apparition gruffly.

Bobbie gazed in wonder; the servitor with the concertina trousers might have stepped out from any burlesque of any triangle drama. Had there been printed across the dazzling shirt-front "James: an old family servant, devoted to the children," he could not have been more obvious.

"So you're the new butler?"

The new butler put his hand on his heart, bowed and growled:

"Yes, sir—name of Smith." He was squinting, his face fearfully distorted.

"Well, I'm going to call you Superbus. Take that look off your face and stop looking round corners."

Mr. Superbus obeyed. He was for a while disappointed.

"Lord, sir, did you recognise me?" he asked. "Maybe Mrs. Ford told you?"

Bobbie smiled derisively.

"Recognise you! Good heavens, why, you absolutely shouted! I spotted you the moment I saw you!"

"That's funny," said Mr. Superbus. "My good lady always says that when I disguise my face that way she would pass me in the street."

"How can you blame her? Who wouldn't pass you in the street with that face? Even your wife has some illusions left, I suppose. Now, Superbus, what is the game?"

Julius was all innocence. A wreath of wild flowers about his head would not have made him more coyishly artless. Bobbie was not deceived.

"Game, sir?"

"Why are you in this house, got up like a comic seneschal? Does Miss Ford know who you are?"

Mr. Superbus closed the door quickly and put his finger to his lips.

" 'Ush!" he said mysteriously.

Bobbie waited.

"Well, I'm 'ushing," he said impatiently.

Julius tiptoed to The Study and beckoned him through the doorway. He had the air of a re-

spectable conspirator; one who knew that whenever the mine exploded he would be out of the way and could, in certain eventualities, be an acceptable witness for the prosecution.

"She sent for me," he said darkly. "Asked me to come and stay here—I come! Could I refuse? If there's any danger I like to be on the spot. That's me!"

Bobbie thought he understood Diana's motive. She wanted a man in the house; he was not alone in respecting the genius of Double Dan.

"Oh, I see. Sensible girl!"

Mr. Superbus nodded.

"Yes, sir, very sensible. I don't know anybody sensibler. She came to the right man. Me."

"I was talking to myself," a little stiffly.

Julius inclined his head again.

"Yes, sir; we both heard you," he said. "I've got wonderful ears."

"I understand Miss Ford was alone in the house and she asked you to come and stay? I'm glad."

"Well, not exactly alone," explained Mr. Superbus, loath to share the honours which were rightly his as Chief Protector. "Of course, there's Uncle Isaac."

Bobbie's mouth opened.

"Unc—Uncle Isaac? Uncle Isaac who?"

Julius had meant to ask this question at the first opportunity.

"I don't know his other name—very bad-tempered gentleman. He has fits; and . . ." He tapped his forehead, but Bobbie did not grasp the sense of the pantomime.

"Uncle Isaac! Suffering Moses!"

Mr. Superbus shook his head.

"No, sir, *he* hasn't come yet. They must be Hebrew gentlemen. Only Uncle Isaac and Mr. Dempsi."

Bobbie knew about Dempsi.

"—and Aunt Lizzie," concluded Julius.

Bobbie staggered, grasped the mantelpiece for support, and turned a wan countenance to the shirt-fronted butler. The unreality of the position was intensified. Presently Julius would produce two rabbits and a bowl of goldfish from a silk hat, and Diana would skip on to the scene in a ballet dress and a fixed smile. And then Bobbie would wake up.

"Do you mind pouring out a drink?" he asked faintly. "My hand's not steady."

The Great Detective opened the tantalus with an air of pride and poured forth a potion.

"Say 'when,' " he said. He would have made a good barman, he was so talkative.

"Aunt Lizzie, I think you said?"

Bobbie had reviewed his relations, but no Aunt Lizzie showed in their serried ranks.

"Yes, sir—she came with Uncle Isaac, yesterday afternoon. Rare pretty young lady she is too. Naturally she and Uncle Isaac don't get on well together. Fancy calling her Lizzie! It's common. And when there's nice names like Maud and Ethel and Agnes to choose from."

Bobbie got back to normal with a struggle.

"Why—why shouldn't she be called Lizzie? It's—it's an auntish name. Aunt Lizzie!"

Mr. Superbus helped himself from the decanter. He it was who had discovered the tantalus in a cabinet. And rights of discoverers are indisputable.

"Good health, sir!" he said, and drank.

"Aunt Lizzie!" muttered Bobbie.

"What I can't understand," said Julius, wiping his mouth deftly, "is, when she's got a good name like Heloise—that's what he calls her when they're alone . . ."

It was not the whisky, for he had not drunk thereof; nor the smell of it, for the aroma had

not reached him. The room suddenly spun before his eyes. He saw twenty-four Superbuses wiping twenty-four moustaches.

"Heloise! Heloise!" he muttered. "Has she —has she got hair dark as the raven's?"

Julius considered. He had never met a raven, but he understood that it was a very dark bird.

"Yes, sir."

"And eyes that probe your soul?" asked Bobbie.

Again the detective considered.

"Well, she ain't done any probing as far as I'm concerned," he confessed, "but there's something about them that's—well, peculiar."

"And the sweetest voice in the world?"

Here again Mr. Superbus was handicapped by a lack of experience. Voices were just voices to him.

"I've never heard her singing," he confessed, "or talking much. She swears a bit at Uncle Isaac, which in my opinion isn't ladylike. Nor smoking, for the matter of that. The way some of these ladies smoke is very sad. Smoking stunts the growth—which a doctor told me, and what a doctor don't know ain't worth knowing."

Bobbie interrupted him.

"Where—where is Uncle Isaac?"

The reply came like a thunderclap.

"Cleaning the silver."

Bobbie reeled.

"Cleaning the silver!" he said, dazed. "I'll wake up in a minute." He pinched himself, Mr. Superbus watching and ready to offer suggestions. They were unnecessary: Bobbie found a tender spot. "I'm awake—it's real. Uncle Isaac is cleaning the silver! Where are the servants—the other servants?"

Julius could take exception at the "other."

"Miss Ford sent them out, if you mean the servants. I'm here professional. I don't mind tellin' you, sir, that my job is to see that Uncle Isaac don't go out too."

Bobbie began at last to see daylight. If it was Gordon, his desire for liberty was not only pardonable but praiseworthy.

"Does he want to go?"

Julius thought the question unnecessary. Surely a member of the family knew all about the family skeletons? At the same time it was only natural that he should pretend he didn't. Julius was a just man.

"He's a bit nutty. See what I mean? He's

got delusions, hallucinations—to use a medical expression. Sees things, thinks he's somebody else. I've had hundreds of such cases through my hands."

"But who put him to clean the silver?" insisted Bobbie.

"Miss Ford. Said it would keep him occupied."

A step in the hall, a heavy step.

"That's him coming now. Don't be afraid of Uncle Isaac, sir: he's as harmless as a child——"

Gordon came in at that moment, but stopped dead at the sight of the visitor. He was in his shirt-sleeves, he carried a duster in his hand, his front was covered with a large white apron and a bib that was kept in place by a pin. Bobbie could not speak—he could only stare and stare.

"By heavens, it's—Uncle Isaac!" he said in a voice that was almost inaudible to Mr. Superbus.

"You know him, sir?" he smiled. "I thought it would be very strange if you didn't. Members of the same family, so to speak, and very likely inflicted in the same way."

"Ye-yes, I know him."

Mr. Superbus approached the unhappy object of their discussion.

"Do you want something, Uncle Isaac?" he

asked kindly, and patted Gordon's arm. So broken was Mr. Selsbury's spirit that his keeper remained alive and uninjured.

"Yes—no," he said hoarsely.

Julius shook his head.

"He can't make up his mind about anything. It takes you that way. I wonder how he ever got married."

Gordon steadied himself.

"Where is—Aunt Lizzie?" he gulped.

"In her room, Uncle Isaac, reading."

For a second Gordon's face was contorted.

"Don't call me uncle," he grated, holding himself in hand. "I'm not *your* uncle, anyway."

"No, sir," admitted Julius. "I haven't got any uncles. Not as far as I know. They run in some families and they don't run in others."

Suddenly his brow clouded, and he glared at Gordon with such intense malignity that even Bobbie quailed.

"Here—I've just got an idea in my head, sir," he slowly, "a sort of inspiration. *Is* that Uncle Isaac?"

Bobbie started.

"Eh?"

"Do you know Uncle Isaac?" The idea or

inspiration had taken firm hold of his imagination. "Suppose Double Dan was passin' himself off as him!"

Bobbie looked past the man to his brother. Gordon was frowning and shaking his head. He wished to keep in the character of the patriarch for some extraordinary reason.

"Oh, yes," said Bobbie, "that is Uncle Isaac." He was almost breathless.

Julius was not immediately convinced.

"Are you sure?" dubiously.

Bobbie became very confident.

"Oh, rather! That is Uncle Isaac all right—how absurd, of course it is Uncle Isaac. I knew him in a minute."

No man readily sacrifices his inspirations—Julius was but human, though there were moments when this was hard to believe.

"Oh!" he said disappointedly. "Mind you, Double Dan's clever."

"Nonsense!" said Bobbie with loud scorn. "He couldn't impersonate Uncle Isaac. I would know him anywhere!"

"Oh, couldn't he . . . !" sneered Superbus. "You don't know Double Dan!"

Bobbie had done some quick thinking. He

must talk to Gordon alone. Mr. Superbus being impervious to the hints which followed:

"I want to have a little talk with my uncle," said Bobbie, "on family business. Do you mind leaving us alone for a minute?"

Julius was in two minds about the matter.

"Don't let him escape," he cautioned. "He's as artful as a monkey! You ought to hear what he did to me last night!"

"Certainly not." Bobbie was ready to promise that he would bring his brother to execution.

Still Mr. Superbus lingered. Diana had gone out, leaving instructions which were to be carried out to the letter. Julius was a stickler for duty.

"And don't let him telephone."

Even this Bobbie promised, and Julius took a reluctant leave.

"I'll be on hand if he's troublesome," he said from the doorway. "Now, no larks, uncle!"

"Uncle" mutely promised.

The portal closed, Bobbie went softly and listened. For a few seconds he waited, and then jerked open the door. Julius was stooping to lace his shoes. A less inquisitive man might have been suspected of having his ear to the keyhole.

"Want me?" he asked with a blameless smile.

"No," said Bobbie, so emphatically that Mr. Superbus could not mistake his meaning. The door closed again.

"Gordon, what on earth——?"

Gordon threw out despairing arms.

"Bobbie, I'm in a hell of a mess," he said, his tone one of anguish beyond remedy.

"What has happened—what does it mean?" asked the bewildered Bobbie. "Why didn't you get in touch with me before?"

Gordon's gesture cut short his questioning.

"I tried to telephone you, but I couldn't get on, and ever since, that infernal jackass has been keeping guard over the instrument. Is it a crime to kill an amateur detective? I've forgotten. I know that in some circumstances murder is justifiable."

"What has happened?" asked Bobbie again.

For fully three minutes Gordon paced the room, so agitated that he could not steady his voice. His relief at Bobbie's arrival had brought the inevitable reaction. Presently he grew calmer.

"When I got to the station to meet—you know——"

"Heloise?"

Gordon winced. He didn't want to talk about Heloise. The very sound of her name gave him a little pain.

"I found her in a state of terrible fear. You can imagine how I felt when she told me that her husband was watching the barriers and thirsting for my blood! She wanted me to go on and await her, but of course I bolted back; went to the hotel to change, and found that the valet who had my bag and had taken it to the station parcels office, was away for the week-end. I came home, and she must have followed."

"Heloise?"

Gordon swallowed something.

"Say 'she' or 'her,' " he begged. "I feel better about her when she's a pronoun!"

"She must have followed?" repeated Bobbie in horror. "Then she *is* here! She—she isn't Aunt Lizzie by any chance?"

"She *is* Aunt Lizzie! Aunt Lizzie! Oh, Bobbie, isn't this the most awful thing that ever happened? What am I going to do? I can't leave the house——"

"But why?" asked Bobbie, thunderstruck.

No man stood less in need of cross-examination at that moment than Gordon. He had hopes

that Bobbie, with his curious insight into human affairs, would accept the situation without demanding analysis.

"I can't understand," began Bobbie. "You've only to explain to Diana——"

Gordon's laugh was harsh. Bobbie had heard him laugh once before like that—when he was recovering from gas after having a tooth out.

"I haven't told you the worst," said Gordon gloomily. "Diana found me here and accused me of being Double Dan. I was struck dumb. The idea was so grotesque that I could not find words to answer her. Suppose somebody came to you in the street and accused you of murder, what would you say? Something amusing? I haven't the gift of persiflage. I could have got out of it even then, but that infernal woman made her appearance and hung round my neck! In a sense she was justified. Diana threatened to shoot her. A woman doesn't like that. What was I to do? My dilemma was a terrible one! I had the alternative of admitting that I was Double Dan, impersonator and teller of plausible stories, or of telling the unbelievable truth, which means that she would have thought that I was engaged in a vulgar affair with Heloise."

This argument seemed very sound to Bobbie.

"Who called her Aunt Lizzie?" he asked. He might have saved himself the trouble.

"Who do you think?" asked Gordon bitterly. "Diana! Bobbie, that girl is driving me mad! Why did she come from Australia to upset my life? And I'm a member of the British Empire League! Curse the Empire! Diana is terrible! She is carrying on with Dempsi under my eyes. The most shocking little cad! A bounder of bounders! And Bobbie, she pretends to be a widow! I don't know whose widow—I sometimes think it is mine. If that is so, the things she says about me are enough to make me turn in my grave!"

Bobbie was very grave and thoughtful. This was a situation so bizarre that it could not be tested by his own experience.

"I see," he said slowly. "Deuced awkward, old man."

Gordon had expected some other comment. In all the conditions "deuced awkward" seemed rather mild.

"You've got to help me get out of this," he said impatiently. "And we've got to deal drastically with Dempsi. Why, he wanted to marry her

this afternoon! Said he knew a place that specialised in Sunday afternoon marriages! The parson called twice! Dempsi carries a special license in his pocket, the hateful little dago! I shall do something desperate. I shall shoot them both."

Bobbie was looking at him curiously. His real anger was so patently directed toward Dempsi, whose chief offence seemed to be that he wanted to marry Diana: which seemed a reasonable and laudable ambition.

"I shouldn't shoot them," said Bobbie slowly. "You'll only get yourself talked about. And besides, I don't see that it is any business of yours. They were old friends, lovers——"

"Do you want to drive me mad?" snarled Gordon. "Lovers! They were never lovers! Diana—Diana, of all women in the world, to—to—carry on like this! Encouraging him—there's no other word for it! Diana, whom I believed the very soul of modesty!"

Bobbie had no especial interest in Diana's soul; he thought she was a nice girl.

"It must have come as a bit of a shock to you," he said sardonically, and Gordon was hurt at the

innuendo. "What does Aunt Lizzie say about it?"

This was a subject on which he could not speak with normal politeness.

"Does it matter what she says? Bobbie, do you know what Diana tried to do? And this reveals an undreamt-of indelicacy of mind. She tried to give us the same room! A wretched little servants' room at the top of the house. She says that Heloise is my accomplice. . . . It's no laughing matter!" Bobbie was rolling helplessly in his chair. "Diana is treating me like a dog."

Bobbie surveyed his relative critically.

"And you look a bit of a dog too in those clothes," he said. "Where did you dig up that suit? Gordon, I've seen a judge send down a man for five years for wearing a suit like that. He said it revealed his criminal psychology."

"Now, Bobbie, you've got to help me." Gordon was not amused. "I'm going to get away. Once I can get to the hotel to my bag, or even if I could get to Scotland—which wouldn't be a bad move—I'm safe. But I haven't a penny! She made me turn out my pockets at the point of a pistol. She is the most thorough woman I have

ever met. Swore that I had been trying to get at the safe and searched me for skeleton keys!"

Bobbie felt in his pockets. The trip to Ostend had exhausted most of the spare cash—and it was Sunday.

"I'm afraid I've no money with me," he said. "I can get a cheque cashed at the club for a tenner——"

"That doesn't matter," interrupted Gordon. "I'll tell you what I want you to do—a very simple service that you can render and will save all bother. When Diana comes——"

Here, Bobbie thought the solution was a very simple one.

"When she comes I'll just tell her that you're really Gordon Selsbury," he said, and Gordon leapt up from the chair where he had been sitting.

"Do you want to ruin me?" he hissed. "Tell her I'm Gordon Selsbury? I've told her, haven't I? But I gave up telling her when I remembered Heloise. How am I going to explain her?"

The crux of the problem was now displayed. Bobbie had no cut and dried solution. Such as presented were so nobbly and damp that he rejected them without examination.

"I'd forgotten about Aunt Lizzie," he said thoughtfully.

Gordon's triumph brought little happiness to him.

"Don't you see it's impossible? Now, I've been thinking the matter over and I've worked out a much better plan than yours. I can get away when this dithering old ass isn't looking—which is pretty often. Diana has to go out early to-morrow to her bankers. That will be my chance, but I must have some money. I want it before the banks open, so you cannot possibly help me there. What you can do is this: persuade Diana to let you have the key of the safe. She's put the lock on as well as the combination. I've tried to open it, so I know. Get the key and pass it to me at the first opportunity."

Bobbie was looking at him very hard now, and Bobbie was whistling.

"Give you the key of the safe?" he said slowly. "By Jove!" His eyes were bulging, his jaw had dropped.

"What's the matter?" demanded Gordon with a sinking feeling in his heart.

Slowly and distinctly the words came.

"You infernal rascal!"

Gordon stepped back as if he had been struck.

"What do you mean?" he gasped. Yet he could not mistake the meaning of words and looks.

Bobbie's attitude had undergone a remarkable change. The friendliness had gone from his tone, the light of fun from his face. He glared at the man before him; judgment and condemnation and doom was in his eyes.

"You *are* Double Dan!" he breathed. "By jinks! I was deceived! You're clever, my man, diabolically clever. Carslake said you were, and like a fool I thought he was exaggerating. You *are* Double Dan! My brother has whiskers! Where are yours? I thought there was something strange about you when I saw you. And now that I come to think of it, that cock-and-bull story of yours about Aunt Lizzie is just the kind of story you would tell if you were detected—phew! Bravo, little Diana!"

Gordon went purple and red; he uttered strange, wild animal noises that had no meaning.

"I swear——"

Bobbie shook his head.

"It won't do, my friend," he said. "I see the

whole plot. Of course, you and your accomplice pumped my unfortunate brother, who is on his way to Paris or some other unreachable place. You discovered that I knew he was going to Ostend, and you changed your plans. Gordon went to Paris as I feared——"

"Alone?"

Gordon was becoming an adept in self-control. Alone? That was a poser for Bobbie.

"I didn't think of that. But there's no reason why part of your original story shouldn't be true. The husband appears, the lady begs the victim to go and she will follow. That is it!"

"I tell you——"

Bobbie stopped his protest.

"No, no, my man, it won't do," he said sternly. "My cousin, Miss Ford, who has so cleverly trapped you, must have some special reason for not wishing to hand you over to justice—had I been she, I would have sent for the police. She has probably taken the wisest course—I will not interfere with her plans."

He laughed softly—Gordon thought that the immaculate agriculturist Abel must have laughed like that; there was something to be said for Cain.

"Give you the key of the safe, eh? I was

nearly deceived; upon my word, I was. Now go on with your dusting, little man, and thank your lucky stars you're not in prison."

Gordon went on with his dusting—he dusted the perspiration from his brow, and the duster was not particularly clean. The result was startling.

"Bobbie!" he wailed.

Bobbie turned on his heel.

"Do you want me to kick you?" he demanded.

Evidently Gordon didn't. He began to rub the back of a chair listlessly. He had no heart in his work, and without enthusiasm even dusting is a failure.

Bobbie opened the door and found Mr. Superbus sitting on the bottom stair, manicuring his nails with a clasp-knife.

"Giving you any trouble, sir?" he asked eagerly, and was disappointed when Bobbie Selsbury shook his head.

"None whatever." He walked back into the room. "Now then, Uncle Isaac, clear out!"

"Did he try to escape, sir?" asked the interested custodian.

Bobbie laughed his Cain and Abel laugh. His

brother wondered where Diana kept her little gun.

"Did he try to escape? I should jolly well say he did!" said Bobbie. "Look after him, Mr. Superbus. You have in your able hands a man of singular cunning and resource."

Mr. Superbus shook his head sorrowfully.

"You're a naughty old Uncle Isaac, that's what you are," he said. "I'm surprised at you."

Gordon collected his dusters and staggered from the room. He was at the end of his dream.

"I'm a naughty old Uncle Isaac," he moaned. "I'm a naughty old Uncle Isaac!"

His moan came up from the deep recesses of the kitchen.

CHAPTER XX

"BOBBIE!"

The girl came toward him with both hands outstretched. Behind her in the hall he saw a strange shadow.

"Hullo, dear! I came as soon as you wanted me, I hope?"

Mr. Dempsi was now visible. His black sombrero gave him a sinister appearance. His voice was querulous, his manner menacing.

"Dear?" he asked deeply. "Who calls you 'dear'? What is this man to you, Diana?"

"My dear Mr. Dempsi," she said wearily, "this gentleman."

But he was furious; flung his hat on the ground and swung his cloak from him with the air of a *capelerro*. Bobbie expected to see a belt with knives and pistols—the poker dot waistcoat was an anticlimax.

"I will not endure it," he stormed. "Do you hear, sir? You address this lady as dear—explain!"

She saved Bobbie the trouble.

"This is Mr. Selsbury, my cousin." Diana was dangerously quiet. Probably Mr. Dempsi, from his long acquaintance with her, recognised the signs.

"Ah! Your cousin! I see the likeness. The same beautiful eyes, the same firm but gentle mouth. The slight figure, the lovely hand——"

Bobbie was annoyed.

"Thank you very much, but when you've finished cataloguing my features and describing my delectable points, perhaps you'll tell me who you are?"

He was antagonistic, and he needed no introduction. For he knew the bearded man, and shared the spurious Gordon's resentment and utter dislike.

"This is Mr. Dempsi," said Diana. "You've heard me speak of him?"

There was an appeal in her eyes which Bobbie could not resist. He made a show of being happy to meet Mr. Dempsi. As an effort of simulation it was a failure.

"Won't you change your coat, Wop—Wopsy—upstairs?" she suggested.

Dempsi kissed her hand.

"My beloved—I go. Your word is law! Sir —cousin—Bobbie, forgive me."

Bobbie forced a smile of friendliness. His gentle cousin thought he was ill.

Mr. Dempsi went singing up the stairs: *Donna e mobile* was the song. He sang it happily and flatly, as though his throat rebelled against this rejoicing in the fickleness of woman.

"Suffering cats!" said Bobbie, awe-stricken. "Is that the First Love?"

She nodded.

"And is that his style of conversation—a bit wearing, isn't it?"

"Wearing? Bobbie, he's just like that to every man who looks at me! He's changed in appearance—I suppose six years makes an awful difference. I used to think there was room for nothing but improvement, for he was only a boy then. But, oh, Bobbie, he's worse! He wanted to strangle the waiter at the Ritz-Carlton at lunch because he was rather good-looking and had a sense of humour—he smiled when I made a feeble joke. And, Bobbie, Double Dan——"

She saw that Bobbie knew, and sighed gratefully. Bobbie was to be a tower of strength: she had guessed that all along.

"He's here," said the young man.

"You've seen him? Thank heavens! He *is* like Gordon, isn't he? The make-up is astounding. I've tried to find out the secret. But he's so useful about the house. That alone betrays him. Gordon lived in the clouds, where there were no laundry bills and no patent sweepers. And he came in time to be Uncle Isaac. No, we haven't any real Uncle Isaac, but he served beautifully, and, what is more, he brought with him a perfectly good aunt——"

"The audacious scoundrel!" Bobbie cried wrathfully. "Why, do you know, he nearly deceived me? I wasn't as clever as you. I talked with him for ten minutes about his troubles. He's evidently studied every detail of appearance and association. And he makes no mistakes—he called me Bobbie the first time he saw me."

"He called me Diana. But he didn't deceive me—not for a moment," said the girl, flopping into Gordon's big chair. "This morning I caught him trying to get into Gordon's dressing-room! He has to be watched day and night, and of course he has a perfectly good excuse for everything he does. He said he wanted some clothes!"

Bobbie thought that a desire to change into

clothing less vocal than the suit he was wearing was not reprehensible even in Double Dan. But the audacity of the man!

"The villain! I wish to heaven I hadn't gone to Ostend."

She reminded herself that she must ask him why he went at all. That could wait, however.

"I had to arrange everything on the spot," she said, going back to the hectic moments of Saturday. "Luckily I remembered that little man's 'phone number—you weren't here when he told me? Hate, hate, ho, Ammersmith. Then I had to invent a story—oh, positively dozens of stories! They weren't lies—just expedients. The stroke of genius was the one about Uncle Isaac being eccentric. Happily Dempsi loves him."

"Who?" asked the startled Bobbie. "Not Uncle Isaac surely? He gave me the impression —but that was in his rôle of Gordon—that he hated him."

"No, I mean Superbus. He took to him at once—it was the sort of thing he would do. He kept white mice when he was a boy and adored them! Dempsi thinks that he and Mr. Superbus must have both descended from Julius Cæsar.

He spent all the morning in the book room searching for Cæsar's Life."

"How does Double Dan accept your treatment of him—and your discovery that he was a fake?"

"That is the surprising thing," said Diana in wonder. "He was meekness itself—I never saw a man so quickly accept a situation as he did."

"And the perfectly good aunt?"

Diana shrugged.

"She was difficult. That is natural, being a woman. But she is tame now. I called her Aunt Lizzie to save a scandal. But"—her voice sank—"they're not married!"

Bobbie tried hard to look surprised.

"Aren't they?"

Diana shook her head. There was some good Puritan blood in the Fords. Bobbie never received evidence of its presence without a little shock of surprise.

"No! Isn't it terrible? They're not married. They are not even engaged: I could tell that by the way she orders him about. She does so with the air of a woman who has nothing to lose. But I'm determined on one thing. I thought it out before I went to bed. He shall marry her before

he leaves this house! She has been hopelessly compromised. This adventure shall have one good result."

Bobbie was not enthusiastic.

"I shouldn't meddle if I were you," he said, but made no impression on her.

Gordon Selsbury came into the room unnoticed. He carried a dustpan and a short-handled broom. He stood for a while irresolutely, neither of the pair noticing him. Then:

"Have you heard from Gordon?"

Her face lit up.

"I've had the loveliest wires from him. Really he has been most thoughtful! The dear man has telegraphed from almost every station."

Bobbie coughed.

"Somehow I thought he would," he said.

She was searching her handbag and brought out a folded paper.

"Here is the last, from Crewe; it didn't arrive until ten o'clock this morning. 'Having a comfortable journey. Hope everything is going smoothly—Gordon.' "

Bobbie sat up.

"Oh, I say, that's too bad," he protested warmly—too warmly, he realised. "I mean, it's

too bad that didn't arrive until to-day. Write to the Post Office."

Gordon growled under his breath, and took another step into the room. Diana saw him, but made no sign. He was one with the furniture.

"If he'd only stay away for another week!" she sighed.

It was the opportunity for which Bobbie had hoped.

"You know, old Gordon isn't such a bad chap," he said. "I know one's first impression is that he is a terrible prig, and his manner is bad, I admit; and he's a thought conceited. These intellectuals are. Though why, I've never understood."

She shook her head. Evidently she had already found excuses for Gordon, and there was no need for his championship.

"Conceited? But most men are, don't you think? I wouldn't call it conceit—he's a little self-important, that's all."

The hand that wielded the broom trembled, the dust-pan wobbled.

"Yes, I suppose that's what he is," said Bobbie thoughtfully. "Gordon was rather spoilt as a kid, and that makes a man a little self-important."

"And pharisaical, don't you think?" suggested Diana, considering. "I ought not to say anything unkind. Really I'm not. He isn't any worse for our frankness."

Mr. Gordon Selsbury half rose from his knees, his mouth working, his face pale with fury.

"I'm inclined to agree with you," said Bobbie regretfully. "And poor old Gordon *has* faults."

"The faults of age," said Diana. "He's the sort of man who has been forty-five ever since he was born; but, thank God, he's not flighty!" she added piously.

The sweeper nodded in agreement, but his faint smile was to vanish.

"Don't put any man on a pedestal, my dear," said Bobbie in the paternal manner.

"Sneak!" said Gordon fiercely but inaudibly.

"The best of men make mistakes," the traitor brother continued. "His very innocence is a disadvantage. I could well imagine that a woman with the right line of talk could twist him round her little finger!"

She dissented. Diana had her own views, and they were mainly unbendable.

"If I were his wife I should trust Gordon, Bobbie," she said seriously. "He's the very soul

of honour. Whatever you say of Gordon, you've got to admit he's that. He wouldn't do anything undignified or vulgar. I could imagine many things, but I could not imagine Gordon going to Ostend, even in a mood of theosophical ecstasy, without a chaperone."

Bobbie shifted uneasily. He was by nature honest, in spite of his being a tea-broker. There were certain fundamentals in his code with which he could not dispense, even to shield Gordon.

"N-no, perhaps not," he said.

She smiled scornfully.

"Perhaps! You know he wouldn't, Bobbie! I can't think of his doing a thing like that. Why, Gordon is the very antithesis of vulgarity! Could you imagine him engaged in a clandestine friendship with a woman like Aunt Lizzie? It is absurd. Can you imagine him walking into this house with a strange female and pretending that he doesn't know her when he is detected? I should imagine not!"

Still Bobbie had a duty to perform.

"I think you're mad to trust any man absolutely," he said firmly. "No man is worthy of that confidence."

She laughed.

"You're a cynical bachelor."

A voice came from the background. An indignant and an emphatic voice.

"That is just what I say," said Gordon. "I can't imagine a more immoral point of view, striking at the very roots—er—um——"

He almost cringed under Diana's gaze.

"How dare you interrupt?" she demanded.

"I—er—I——"

Bobbie took a hand.

"Now see here, my friend, you take my advice and drop this pretence," he said gravely. "You will deceive nobody—though I can understand why you have not given up hope—and you may get yourself into very serious trouble. If I had my way, you would be in that position at this moment, but my cousin, for an excellent reason, has refrained from handing you over to the police. That generosity ought to be appreciated by you."

Gordon set his teeth, cast broom and brush to the devil and leapt up.

"I don't care—I will tell the truth," he said doggedly. "In spite of everything—in spite of all appearances, I am Gordon Selsbury."

He looked round: Superbus was at the door, a buff envelope in his hand. It was no use; he went

down on his knees and groped for the dustpan. He was beaten.

"A wire for you, ma'am. I never knew they came on Sunday."

She took the envelope and tore it open.

"Another! 'Aberdeen. Very good journey and looking forward to my return. Gordon.' "

Bobbie gaped.

"What an artist!" he said.

She turned on him with a frown.

"I say, what a nasty journey!" corrected Bobbie.

She nodded slowly, thoughtfully.

"Do you know, I'm beginning to feel quite different toward Gordon," she said.

The sweeper sat up on his heels expectantly. For a second she became conscious of his presence.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" she asked coldly.

"Nothing—nothing." The despairing man stooped to his task.

"Where is your—your accomplice?" she asked.

Gordon turned his head.

"She's reading—'How to be Happy though Married,' " he said cynically.

Kindness was wasted on such a man.

"What are you going to do with Dempsi?" asked Bobbie, leaning across and dropping his voice.

She made a little face.

"I'm in despair, Bobbie. I can't count on his losing himself again. The only thing he shows any signs of losing is his head—and I never knew him when he had one worth losing. Well?"

It was Superbus again. She wished he wouldn't put his hand on his heart before he bowed.

"That parson gentleman's called again," he said in a hoarse whisper. "He's the Vicar of Banhurst."

Superbus was country-bred and was schooled in the values of ecclesiastical rank. The Vicar of Banhurst was a person of eminence. To Diana he was part of the marriage trap. The steel grille that would cut her off from freedom. She was panic-stricken by his very presence in the house.

"Tell him I'm ill," she said frantically. "Tell him—I'm—I'm very ill. Ask him to come to-morrow. And please, please don't tell Mr. Dempsi he is here."

"He said if you'd call him up—" Superbus offered tentatively the clerical card. She waved it away.

"I don't want his address—I don't *want* it!"

Mr. Superbus did his bow and went out. Her face was the picture of woe.

"Bobbie, what am I to do? That's the third time he's called to-day."

"Who is he?"

"The clergyman. Dempsi's idea! He thinks our marriage is a matter of hours! It is so like Dempsi, so absurdly, so tragically mad; but he'd hardly been with me two minutes before he told me he was sending for the parson to 'make us one'! And I know which one! I read the review of a book to-day by a man whose name I forget. It doesn't matter. He says that there are conditions in which assassination is the purest and noblest expression of public sentiment. Will you get it for me?"

"But he couldn't marry you in the evening," persisted Bobbie. "It is against the law."

She was darkly amused.

"Against the law! What is a little thing like that to Dempsi? He is the law!"

"It seems a simple matter to get him away." Bobbie searched his mind for a solution. "Have you any plan?"

Had she any plan? Was there a moment of consciousness in the day that she did not form a new scheme to rid herself of her electric incubus?

"I've a hundred, and they're all futile and foolish. I thought of running away. That seems about the only sane idea I have had."

"Running away? To where?" he asked.

"To Scotland. To join Gordon."

Bobbie jumped up, a very perturbed young man.

"You mustn't do that!" he cried. "Whatever you do, don't do that, Diana! In the first place, none of us knows where he is; in the second place —well . . . I shouldn't do it."

Her eyebrows rose.

"Why not? I could tell Gordon the whole truth, and I'm sure he would be nice and sympathetic. I feel very sure of Gordon in a great crisis like this—it is a very dear feeling to have." She smiled a little pathetically.

"Suppose Dempsi followed you—and he certainly would," urged Bobbie. "Suppose he found

that you'd deceived him, and came upon you on the moors with Gordon?"

The smile deepened; into her eyes came a far-away look.

"That's an idea. Gordon would have his gun on the moors," she said. "Hush! Here he comes."

Bobbie had agreed readily to stay the night, for the great Superbus was tired, being human, as he explained, and having only one pair of eyes that needed rest.

There was a slight scene at dinner (Heloise cooked this, and Diana's respect for her increased).

Dempsi, in his most extravagant mood, called for wine. He wanted wine, red wine—to drink the health of his bride. He demanded that it be red and rosy. That it bubbled with the laughter of sunny vineyards. That its hue be as of the warm, rich blood of youth, palpitating, pulsing, seething with love. This he said in so many words. Bobbie said something terse and offensive, and offered him a whisky and soda. Mr. Dempsi looked black, and Diana hastily intervened. But she might as well have attempted to

stay the tide of time. Dempsi made a remarkably quick recovery; spoke tremulously of his happiness; kissed Diana's hand; gave her for the third time the history of his life.

When he lay in the foul huts of the natives, recovering from his fever, when he searched the world through for traces of his lost love, when, under the starry skies of the Australian bush, he pressed on desperately, doggedly, unflinchingly, following the trail of his divine lady—this was the thought he had—Diana! That some day she should be his! The past sad years should be blotted out and forgotten. All the misery of life would vanish as in a cloud.

"Rot!" said Bobbie.

Mr. Dempsi dissolved into tears.

"Really, Diana, I can't stand that fellow," said Bobbie, when the devoted lover had flooded from the room.

Diana lay back limp in her chair, fanning herself with her handkerchief.

"Bobbie, he's—he's terrible!" she moaned. "Bobbie, there must be some other solution than murder?"

Mr. Dempsi, in his temperamental way, re-

covered his equilibrium before he had crossed the hall. Julius Superbus was making up The Study fire as he came in—Dempsi went straight to him, laid his hand on his shoulder, too overcome for speech.

"Ah, my friend!" he murmured.

Julius, at a loss for a suitable response, played for safety.

"Good-evening, sir," he said, and patted his fellow Roman on the head.

"The one friend I have in this house—the one understanding soul! The one honest creature that is faithful to my memory."

Mr. Dempsi invariably spoke of himself as though he had recently returned from a brief holiday in heaven.

"I wouldn't say that, sir," said Julius generously. "There are others."

"I do say it! I, Guiseppi Dempsi! Who denies my right?" he demanded fiercely.

Julius backed off.

"Not me, sir, I'm sure," he said hastily. "It's the last thing in the world I'd dream of doing."

Guiseppi grew gentle again.

"The moment I saw you, I said: 'Here is a

man with vision, a big man, a man of sensibility! Superbus has a heart, feeling, *simpatico*—a man of affairs, a keen-eyed officer of the law!"

Mr. Superbus moved uneasily. He had all an amateur detective's fear of misrepresentation. He coughed.

"Not exactly an officer of the law, sir. In a sense I am, and in a sense I'm not, though I used to be when I was a bailiff in the County Court."

Dempsi smiled.

"But now you are a detective. A disciple of the immortal Holmes—what a man, what ingenuity! You are this—you told me?"

Julius hastened to correct a wrong impression.

"Private, sir, private. As I explained to you, sir, I was brought in——"

Dempsi never allowed anybody else to talk.

"To watch for a despicable scoundrel," said Dempsi hotly. "That such should be at liberty! Double Dan! Even his name is deplorable! Ah! You are surprised that I have heard of this violator of sanctuaries? You clever detective, you are astounded and flabbergasted that I also know of this pestiferous brigand? Superbus, I ask a favour: when you have discovered him, send for me."

There was a significant glitter in his eyes. His half-closed hands already dripped with the blood of his victim. Mr. Superbus was spellbound.

"Send for me," repeated Dempsi deliberately. "I haven't killed a man for years. But I will not speak of that. I am too sorry for his wife and family. I have a tender heart." He gazed at Julius in admiration. "So you are a detective! One of that great and silent army of watchers, everlastingly on duty, standing between peaceable citizens like Guiseppi Dempsi and the vultures who prey upon society!"

Dempsi held out his hand. Mr. Superbus, his eyes modestly lowered, took it. He felt for once that he was being taken at a proper valuation. Dempsi was a man of the world, a Sir Hubert whose praise was praise indeed. Julius made a mental note of the words for future exhibition.

At any moment Dempsi might switch off to an unimportant subject.

"Yes, it is a bit of a job," agreed Julius. "The public don't understand."

"They wouldn't," said Mr. Dempsi scornfully.

"We take some risks," Mr. Superbus went on. "You can't get about town without taking risks —I was nearly run over by a 'bus yesterday."

Dempsi was impressed.

"No!"

Julius nodded.

"I was—in the execution of me duty," he said. "I saw a suspicious looking man—he looked like a fellow that had been owing me money for years —and crossed the road to have a look at him." His gesture suggested a swerving motor 'bus. "As near as that," he said simply but impressively.

Dempsi shuddered appropriately.

"Ah, it is fine work! Have you brought many men to justice? I see you have, but it is too painful to talk about. I understand your fine feelings —you are worthy."

"Well, I've brought them to the County Court," said Julius. "That's not exactly to justice. People who can't pay their bills and owe tradesmen money."

The other regarded him in awe.

"I wonder you can sleep at night," he said in a hushed voice.

Julius smiled callously. He suggested thereby that the ruin of small litigants meant less to him than the indubitable fact that flies have corns and suffer from asthma.

"They never get on my mind," he said; "and

as for sleeping—I'm a pretty good sleeper; nothing disturbs me."

He hoped, at any rate, that nothing would disturb him that night, for he was sleeping on a made-up bed in The Study. It was Diana's idea and he viewed all Diana's ideas with a suspicion which was, it must be confessed, justifiable.

"Ah, a good conscience!" said Dempsi. "What a beautiful thing!"

Mr. Superbus wasn't sure whether this admirable characteristic of his was due entirely to conscience.

"A good digestion's got something to do with it," he said. "I'm a careful feeder."

"Tell me," said Dempsi confidentially, "have you served her long—my queen?"

Mr. Superbus called up to memory his acquaintance with contemporary history.

"I thought you had a king in Italy?" he said.

Dempsi laughed.

"No, no, you mistake me—my sweet lady—my Diana?" he asked softly. "I am jealous of your privilege in serving her."

"Oh, you mean ma'am? No, I've only just got to know her."

Dempsi changed the subject abruptly.

"I will go to bed. To-night there is no lock upon my door. If Double Dan comes, you will let me know?"

He need not ask that question. Given consciousness and the ability to scream, all the house would know from Julius that the monster had arrived.

"Why, certainly. But I can manage him."

Dempsi bit his lower lip, viewing his friend thoughtfully.

"Yes, yes, I shall know the moment the firing starts—at the first bang I will be by your side."

Julius turned white. In moments of great excitement all great Romans go white. Cæsar Borgia had that failing. And for the matter of that, so had Nero, the celebrated fire-bug.

"Firing?" he asked faintly.

Dempsi nodded.

"He is armed—certain to be. But remember this—and let it be in your mind all the time; the thought may comfort you—when you fall I shall be ready to take your place."

Julius stretched his neck forward.

"When—when I fall?" he said unsteadily.

"I'm not likely to fall if I keep to the carpets—it's the par-kay that does me in."

"You will look up and see me"—Dempsi obviously relished the picture he drew—"perhaps the last thing you will ever see on earth—standing over your prostrate body, pierced, my poor Superbus, by a dozen bullets. I shall be there, face to face with your murderer!"

Julius closed his eyes and his lips moved. Yet he was not at his devotional exercises. Before his horrified vision spread a veritable panorama of tragedy with one notable figure in the foreground somewhat inanimate.

CHAPTER XXI

"But you shall not die unavenged, my Superbus!"

Dempsi's affectionate hand was on his arm. Julius moved away from the fire; he had gone suddenly hot.

"You're sure he carries firearms?"

Dempsi nodded.

"Loaded? That's against the lore, sir. A man could be pinched for that."

Mr. Dempsi treated the matter light-heartedly. Julius could not but feel that his indifference was almost criminal.

"Certain," he said carelessly. "I've never met a desperado yet—and I've met a few—that didn't carry a loaded gun—generally throwing a hollow-nosed bullet. And they're pretty good shots."

He appeared to take a pride in their marksmanship. Julius leered at him—there is no other description for the grimace.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said huskily. "Of course, my good lady——"

Dempsi did not let him finish. He became suddenly serious as though the gravity of the situation had forced itself upon him.

"Your wife? Have no fear, Superbus," he said quickly. "She shall never want. I will make it my business to see that she is provided for. And your deed shall be commemorated: I promise you that. I myself have suffered from a thoughtless failure to immortalise my name. I have in my mind a great tablet of black marble, chaste of design. Simple yet grand. Plain, yet in a sense decorative. And an inscription in letters of gold:

"'To the memory of Julius Superbus,
A Hero, a Gentleman and a Roman.'"

His voice trembled as he spoke. Already he stood before the monument in tears. Julius wiped the perspiration from his pale face.

"Yes, very pretty," he said, and now his hoarseness was chronic. "As I was saying, my good lady will be pleased. She always had a good opinion of me, though she's never mentioned it. But at the same time, though I'm very much obliged to you, and nobody could be kinder about it——"

"Can't you see her standing reading the inscription?" asked Dempsi in a hushed voice. "Can't you imagine her looking up to the slab—fixed in a respectable church, perhaps under a stained-glass window—with proud, shining eyes, her children by her side——"

"I haven't got any children," said Julius loudly.

Dempsi spread out his expressive hands.

"She may marry again," he said considerately. "She is probably in the prime of life. There may still be happiness for her."

Mr. Superbus sat down limply.

"You ain't half putting the wind up me!" he said fretfully.

Dempsi bent over him, speaking softly.

"To-night I sleep in sound of your voice. Have no hesitation in calling me. Perhaps I may arrive in time to save you. I pray that this may be. I like you. We are—who knows?—kinsmen. He who strikes you, strikes me—Guiseppi Dempsi."

Mr. Superbus got up; his knees were without strength, his tongue was parched.

"Well, if you're sleeping here, and Mr. Bobbie is sleeping here, there doesn't seem any call for me to stay, does there? Not that it worries me.

Far from it. Danger is always welcome to a Superbus. It's my good lady I'm thinking of. I was going to sleep in this room. Seems silly."

"I shall be on hand," said Mr. Dempsi, and examined the short-barrelled revolver he had taken from his hip pocket.

Julius almost swooned.

"I'm a match for any man of my own weight," he said, his voice trembling as he thought of the terrible risk which any burglar of his own weight would run, "if he'll only give me a chance. But they don't give you a chance. They're on you before you know where you are—is that fair?"

Dempsi did not answer. Aunt Lizzie had chosen that moment to wander into the room. Julius seized the opportunity to steal from the unnecessary gaiety that shone through Mr. Dempsi's sympathy—his eagerness to frame epitaphs which Julius would never see, his cold-blooded plottings for the future of his good lady.

CHAPTER XXII

THE atmosphere of a kitchen, however clean and well-ordered it may be, is calculated to pall on any man of intellect and genius. It needs the gross mind of a materialist, a man like the husband of Heloise (Gordon's expression was one of distaste as he thought of that man) to appreciate the lingering fragrance of long-baked and long-consumed pies, the everlasting aroma which the spluttering hot oven has sent forth from time to time through the years, to permeate the homely furniture, and through that medium to retain its delicate nidus for the joy of those lovers of good food to whom such smells were appetising.

Gordon had read everything that was readable. He had skipped through two cookery books, and had read the old newspapers in the wood cupboard. The almanac above the kitchen range he knew by heart, so that he could have told you the exact date when everybody of importance was born, married or assassinated.

Happily, he had seen little of Heloise and less of Diana. At the thought of Diana his expres-

sion changed from one of great sadness to one of intense malignity. And then he would laugh softly, for, despite all that had been said (and that in his hearing) he possessed a sense of humour. How remarkably capable she was! In his bitterest moments this fact worked out from the confusion of his resentment. And how lovely! Once he had tried to patronise her . . . he blushed at the memory. Suppose he hadn't gone away on this mad adventure, would he have recognised all her excellent qualities as he saw them now? It was doubtful. He was so keyed up, his nerves were stretched at such tension, that every note of her was detected and valued. And of course she was behaving in this outrageous way in his interest. He warmed at this thought. But Dempsi . . . his heart went back into the refrigerator.

The door opened slowly and he looked up, hoping to see the subject of his thoughts. But he was to be disappointed. It was Heloise. She threw down the book she was carrying, tore off the selvedge of an old newspaper that lay on the table, and, by its aid and the kitchen fire, lit a cigarette.

He got up from the Windsor chair before the fire, and, without a word of thanks, she dropped

into his place. She smoked, watching the fire. She was pretty too, but in a harder way. He felt just a little sorry for her. . . .

Presently Gordon broke into her thoughts.

"You've landed me in a pretty fine mess," he said without heat.

She looked up at him sideways, flicking the ash from her cigarette with a cute little snap of her forefinger.

"*I've* landed *you!*" she said ironically. "I like that—anyway, there's no call to get mad, Man."

A cold chill ran down his spine at that familiar form of address.

"I wish you wouldn't call me Man. It belongs to bobbed hair and empress gowns and art serge . . . and soul."

She laughed quietly; she hadn't laughed for a long time.

"You used to like me calling you Man—in the days of our spiritual freedom, when deep called to deep—oh, gee! I forget the mush! And only two days ago I was word-perfect—knew every line."

Gordon rivetted his shocked gaze upon her.

"I don't understand . . . knew your lines? What do you mean?"

She was examining the cigarette between her fingers. He had a dreadful foreboding that a revelation was imminent.

"I mean all that stuff we used to talk—the O Man! stuff and the O Woman! stuff. And about our being on planes, and affinities of souls. My, but I had a bad time trying not to go to sleep. You're different now—I kinder like you this way. I'm strong for common sense and nature. Man! I've been the making of you."

"The breaking of me, you mean," he snapped, the old grievance revived. "If you hadn't come here, I could have explained everything to Diana —Miss Ford."

"I like 'Diana' better," she said. "That young dame is surely no miss. She's either been married or she's studied first-hand. If I hadn't come!" She jerked up her head derisively.

"Why did you?" he asked. Even now he half believed the story she had told. Illusions die hard, but she was mercifully sudden.

"Because my man double-crossed me," she said coolly.

Gordon could not believe the evidence of his ears.

"Your man? Your husband, you mean?"

She flung away the cigarette, stood up and stretched her hands about her head.

"My husband is the straightest thing that ever happened," she answered. "I'm talking of Dan —Double Dan, you call him!"

The tick-tick of the kitchen clock filled the interval.

"You're working—with—Double—Dan?" he breathed. Even now he could not believe her.

She smiled pityingly.

"Surely," she nodded. "Why do you think I allowed myself to be made love to by you? Be honest with yourself and tell me what there is in your equipment that a woman could rave about?"

He stammered a wrathful denial.

"I didn't make love to you," said Gordon hotly. "We talked about things . . . and you . . . and me—about our tastes. . . ."

"If you had as much experience as I have," said Heloise, "you'd know that that was being made love to." She nodded wisely. "Maybe you didn't know—you know now."

Gordon's anger was rising.

"We talked on—on a higher plane," he said sharply. "We talked of . . . imponderable things. There was never . . . never a caress.

I hardly held your hand. Do you suggest there was anything in our little talks about prehistoric creatures," he sneered, "or in our interchange of thought about the subconscious ego?"

To his horror she nodded.

"Sure! That's how highbrows make love. When they start in to tell me about the Dinornis and the Silurian age, I know they got a crush on me."

She herself might have been a Dinornis or something equally extinct and terrible by his attitude toward her.

"Then it *was* a plot to get me away?" he asked breathlessly.

"Didn't you know?" She was frankly surprised. "You're a slow thinker—but you're right! It was my job to get you away good and safe, and I could have done it, whilst Double Dan——"

"Impersonated me!"

He saw all things clearly. Mysteries were mysteries no more. There was little left upon which a harassed man need speculate.

Her face was sombre and brooding. Evidently she was thinking happily.

"He put one over on me. Gosh! That

fellow's mind is so constructed that he couldn't go straight if he was sliding down a tube! And I went into it with my eyes open—yes, sir. Some of the boys who'd worked with him and one of his partners told me he'd do it before I left Manhattan Island. I had my warning—but I'm one of those dames who know it all and I wouldn't believe 'em. That's the kind of mad woman I am. And all they said came true. Yesterday morning, when everything was fixed for me to tote you to Ostend, I went to see him to split the Mendlesohn money. No, I wasn't in that. But the little friend of mine who brought Father Eli to the verge of marriage had to go back home. Her eldest boy was ill, and I advanced her her share. Forty-sixty, that's how I shared, and how Freda had arranged to share. And that's how I paid her—and it was worth it. Freda put in a whole lot of good, solid work for that guy. Only interest he had in life was stamps—postal stamps. Freda studied those darned foolish things so that she jumped every time the postman knocked. Dan would part on terms—and I'm his friend! Used to be in the same touring company as me, back home!"

Gordon was rubbing his head mechanically.

"Your—your husband, is he?"

Her scorn was visible.

"My husband!" she scoffed. "Now listen! I'm a respectable married woman and you gotta remember that, Man! Married ten years. I've the daisiest little apartment over in New York—and a real nice lovely boy of a husband."

"In New York?" he managed to ask.

She hesitated.

"Why, he's not in New York now: he's in the State Penitentiary—an innocent man, as heaven is my judge! You know what these Central Office men are! They'd swear you into the chair for a nickel. And John could have got evidence that he was a sleep-walker. Yes, sir. He's been that way for years. When the bulls got him in Ackensmidt's Jewellery Store, he didn't know how he got there himself—he's one of the best singers in the Sing Sing Glee Party, is John. But he's due home in a month and naturally I'm going home to meet him."

"But is he a—a thief?" he blurted.

A pink and angry flush spread on the classic face of Heloise.

"Say, where did you get all that personal stuff? Thief! John's no thief—he's had a lot of bad

luck, I guess. But sleep-walking is at the bottom of it. When he's awake he wouldn't take anything unless he got a receipt for it. It's at nights he goes kinder crazy. No, sir, John is a gentleman—though he's on the register as a safe and strong-room expoit—expert."

He was calmer now and prepared, if necessary, to enquire into the profits of the business.

"He's a bank-smasher!" he said sagely. "How interesting! And of course he smashes the banks where he hasn't a deposit."

The futility of his remark was palpable even to himself.

"Sure thing. That's what John is. I used to work with him, but it got him rattled when I was around, so I fixed to work with Dan, who's a snake but a workman. I'll say that for him—he's all for business. Dan always treats his partner as a lady. When I've said that I come right to the end of Dan's attractions."

She spoke as an actress might speak about a fellow member of the cast—without anger, fairly. Gordon stopped strumming funeral marches on the kitchen table and became alive to the realities.

"But is Dan coming here?" he asked.

"Disguised as me! Is—is that the game? What a blind idiot I was! And you, of course, were the decoy . . . and all that soul stuff, as you call it, was——?"

"Bunk," she said. "It would have been bunk anyway if I'd meant it. That kind of talk is never anything else."

He was still helplessly puzzled.

"But . . . why did you come here?"

"Because I want my money back—the money I advanced to my little friend. And he just wouldn't split with me. Said he hadn't got Mendlesohn's cheque—can't you see Dan taking cheques? Said he was short of money—that fellow has got Ananias down for the count. Yes, sir. Why, he was so stuffed with bills you couldn't touch him without he crackled! He had so much money he had to carry it under his arm! When I told him I wouldn't go on till he'd settled the old account, he told me to go to blue blazes. Or some place. Said I'd no right to pay the girl, and that he'd finish the job without me. But he won't!"

Gordon glowered down on her.

"Why do you tell me this? Don't you realise that you've placed yourself in my hands?" he

asked. "I have only to 'phone the police and you're finished!"

She was not perturbed.

"Man, you've got a head like a haunted house! Forget it—Uncle Isaac!"

He wilted under the blow. Uncle Isaac! He was in a hopeless position.

"How shall I recognise him—this Double Dan—when he comes? When do you expect him?"

Whatever happened, Double Dan's scheme should be brought to failure, he decided.

"Why, Dan sort of happens naturally," she said lazily. "I lift my tile to him every time. He is certainly the most artistic guy in the business. I can't let my feelings prejudice me. He a great artist. The Lord didn't give him any ideas about simple division, but we're not all born mathematicians. You'll not know him when he comes. He doesn't always pretend to be the sucker he's robbing. Sometimes he's a butler."

Gordon started. Superbus! Yet it seemed impossible that a man could sink so low that he would impersonate the Roman.

"You mean—our stout friend the detective?"

"Well, I've known him before to make up like a detective who's watching for him, and, what's

more, get away with it. It's one of Dan's favourite disguises, and he's got others. I'm giving you a million dollars' worth of information, Man. You ought to thank me on your knees, but you won't. Another good one of his is to be a visiting clergyman—that's one of his best. He told me once that he'd made a quarter of a million dollars out of the church."

"A minister—there's been one here to-day," said Gordon thoughtfully. "Why don't you turn King's evidence against him?"

"State's evidence, I guess that means? No, sir. That means nothing to me, and you're insulting me by suggesting it. This is a private matter between D. D. and H. C.—Chowster is my name—my father was a Reverend Chowster of Minneapolis and I'm a high-school girl and don't forget it. Anyway, I'm just too much of a lady to start makin' entries in the squeal book. Birth and education count for something, Man."

He covered his face with his hands.

"What a fool I've been, what a fool!" he groaned.

Heloise looked at him: in this mood he was interesting.

"Why, I guess every man's a fool—he's born

that way, and has got twen'y years to pull himself right before some woman comes along and spoils his chance. I used to know a boy in Ontario, where I was born—Minneapolis, I mean—who got right after he was married, but he was an exception. And he'd done the mischief then."

"I'll not stand it," said Gordon between his teeth. "Whatever happens, I'm going to put a spoke in the wheel of this Double Dan."

"You don't say?" She was politely intrigued.

"Am I going to remain quietly by and see a couple of crooks——"

"Oh, say!" she protested.

"—robbing society with impunity?"

"That's fine. And if Dan gets busy he'll rob with any old thing that's handy. He's a genius that way. My John says that Dan could open a safe with a hairpin——"

"I'll report this to the police," said Gordon firmly. "I was a fool not to take this step before. It may mean exposure, it may mean social ruin; it will certainly mean. . ." He stopped before he came to the possible effect upon Diana. "I'll have you both in gaol—both of you."

She was unaffected by his fury.

"Honey bunch, oh honey!" she cooed. "Don't get mad, baby!"

He turned on her in fury.

"You've done your best to make Miss Ford think I'm—I'm something to you. I would have forgiven you everything but that."

"Well, ain't you?" she drawled. "Ah, peachy boy, don't be mad at your little snookums! Smile, baby, show little toothsies."

Diana, in the opening of the kitchen door, heard only this.

"Will you kindly reserve your love-making until you are out of my house?" she asked severely.

At the sound of her voice Gordon reeled. The final straw had dropped brutally upon a camel, already over-burdened.

"Why, I don't know," said Heloise, her insolent gaze turned on the intruder. "It seems to me that a cook's got a right to a li'l bit of love, honey? I'll admit that Uncle Isaac ain't so cute as darling Wopsy. But he's a real nice boy in Aunt Lizzie's eyes."

Gordon would have intervened, but his spirit was broken. He slunk into the scullery and dropped his aching head upon the knife-machine.

CHAPTER XXIII

For once Diana was silenced. It was absurd that she should attempt to justify herself to a woman of this character. Yet she did.

"Mr. Dempsi is—is a very dear friend. To compare your—oh, it's horrible!"

She was sickened—the realisation of her own hypocrisy did not lessen the nausea. There was no comparison. Of the two men, Double Dan was the more appealing.

No index of her mind went unread by the shrewd watcher.

"I gotta stick by this anyhow. It's no vacation for me," said Heloise with a sigh.

The effect was magical—the frown vanished from Diana's face and a soft light came to her eyes.

"I'm sorry for you sometimes," she said.

Heloise raised her left shoulder.

"Why, I'm sorry most times. Gee! It's a helluva life," she said bitterly.

Diana's heart went out to the woman. Her

loneliness, the atmosphere of tragedy which now enveloped her, called for tenderness and help.

"I ought to have realised that," she said gently. "I'm sorry I was sharp."

The great strategist is he who recognises the moment when his enemy is wavering. Heloise brought up her heavy guns.

"I was a good woman before I met him," she said with a little sob. Gordon, a horrified listener, came gasping into the kitchen.

"You—you——!"

"Silence!"

Under the flashing eyes of Diana Ford his courage failed. Like the fisherman's wife, he could only stand and watch and suffer.

"He just naturally dragged me down." Heloise was playing for safety and freedom, and she was a champion player.

Diana's voice quivered as she turned on the shrinking man.

"You brute! To think that a man like you should be allowed to prey upon humanity! I suspected something like this! You are a human tiger, unfit to live—Why don't you leave him, Heloise?" she asked tenderly.

Heloise wiped her eyes and sniffed.

"He's got me—so." She put down her thumb suggestively. "That kind of man doesn't let up on a woman once she's in his power. She's his till doom."

Gordon shuffled his feet and she stepped back, fear in her face.

"Don't let him touch me!" she cried in terror.

In another second Diana's arm was about her.

"Stand back," she said sternly. "Does he—does he strike you?"

Heloise nodded with just that show of reluctance that was so convincing.

"I'm just black and blue sometimes," she wept. "He'll beat me for this, sure. Don't trouble about me, Miss Ford—I'm naturally worthless. I must stand by Dan to the end of the chapter—heaven help me!"

"You villian!" The girl was in tears too. Gordon was beyond weeping. "But why can't you leave him?" Diana's voice was low and vibrant. "Are you married?"

The slow smile that dawned on the sad face told its own black story.

"That kinder man doesn't marry," said Heloise quietly.

The basilisk glare of Diana's eyes turned to Gordon, dumb and motionless.

"But he shall!" she said slowly.

Heloise went swiftly past her and fell on her knees at Gordon's feet. He did not even attempt to draw his hands away when she clutched them. This nightmare would pass—he was sure of that. Monstrous things like this did not happen in a well-ordered world. He had only to keep quiet and calm and presently Trenter's voice would say: "Eight o'clock, sir; I'm afraid it is raining." Trenter always apologised for the weather. And he would open his eyes . . .

Through the haze of his dream came the moaning sound of Heloise pleading.

"Dan, you heard what the good young lady said. Marry me, Dan—won't you marry me?"

Gordon smiled foolishly. To Diana it was devilish.

"Make me like I was when you took me from my li'l Connecticut home," sobbed Heloise. Not for nothing had she played a small town tour with that masterpiece *Rich Men and Poor Women.* "Don't you see it, Dan? The old farm an' the old cows comin' along the boardwalk, an' can't you hear the cracked bell of the chapel, an' don't

you remember my old mother sittin' right there on the porch read'n' the good old Book? Make it come back again, Dan."

Her voice rose to a thin, agonized wail. For a second Gordon returned to near normal.

"What do you mean by this tomfoolery?" he squeaked, trying to disengage his hand.

"Man!" Diana was unconscious of the plagiarism. "Be careful!"

He shook his head.

"I tell you——"

"You shall marry her!"

"I—I can't—I won't . . . I'll see you all to the devil."

Heloise cowered under the stroke of fate.

"You promised me, Dan! You promised me! You're not going back on your word? Dan, say it ain't true—it's not true, Dan?"

It was terrible, thought Diana, her heart broken by the woman's woe.

"You don't mean it, Dan, do you? It's only your joking way?" Gordon showed his teeth in a fiendish grimace. "Ah, I can see you smiling. I can see the li'l twinkle in your eye! We'll quit this business like this pretty young lady says an' shake the whole outfit, won't we, Dan? And I'll

be just your li'l wife sittin' on the back porch, whilst you're mixin' the hen-feed in the garden."

"Damn the hen-feed!" he yelled. "Curse you and your back porch! I won't marry you. Diana, can't you see that she's a fake? She's acting! I'm nothing to her!"

"He spurns me," groaned Heloise, and fell prostrate to the floor. Instantly Diana was beside her and had raised the bowed head.

"Come with me, my dear. Appeal is wasted on a man like that. Ah, you can laugh!"

"I'm not laughing," said Gordon indignantly. "What the devil is there to laugh at? If I laughed at anybody I would laugh at you, you . . . you booby!"

She cast upon him one harrowing glance of contempt, and then devoted her attention to the girl.

"If I gave you the money to get to your home, would you go?"

Heloise nodded weakly.

"You shall have it to-morrow. Come with me."

Heloise gently freed herself of the detaining arm.

"No—no, I'll stay," she said brokenly. "I

guess there's something I want to say to Dan, something that I want no other woman to hear."

Diana went pale.

"I think I understand," she said quietly, and went out, closing the door softly behind her.

Heloise waited, crept to the door and listened before she spun round, joy in her face.

"Whoop-ee!" She danced round the kitchen. "I got my fare! I got my fare! Oh boy, some leading woman! Heloise, your salary is raised and your name's in lights."

"You, you wicked woman!" gasped Gordon. "How dare you—how dare you!"

"Aw, listen!" Hand on hip, she faced him, looking from under her curling lashes. "I gotta get somethin' on the side. Be reasonable, Man. I'm broke—I couldn't raise two dollars. Suppose Dan does pay up—where's my transportation coming from? Have a heart, birdie."

"You've deceived Miss Ford."

"Now listen to Holy Mike! Haven't you deceived her? Anyway, you don't deserve a nice li'l girl like that. Don't think I despise her because she's easy. That's a real nice girl. You lied when you said you were married—you may

be, but it is not to Diana. And never will be. She's got brains."

He strode up and down the kitchen with furious strides, muttering under his breath. Presently he confronted her.

"You take away my character—you accuse me of the most abominable acts. You swear away my reputation in a most disgraceful manner. I am Double Dan in her eyes."

She had found and lit another cigarette and was sitting on the table, her feet swinging.

"Gee, you've gotta get a sense of humour, boy," she said good-naturedly. "You're too serious, that's what's wrong with you! She's a good dresser too—that gown she was wearing this afternoon certainly made me feel old."

He was cooling down now. The uselessness of argument or appeal was so apparent that he fell into her mood.

"I shall finish in a lunatic asylum," he said, "just as surely as Double Dan will finish in jail."

"Don't you worry. The li'l game is going to end very soon. I'm through. John's due home in a fortnight, and I'm just longing for the smell of rubber an' oil an' breakfast. That's what a

ship smells like to me. I'm going to have it out with Dan."

"You mean, he is coming—that we shall meet?" asked Gordon eagerly.

"We shall meet and he shall part," she said cryptically, "that's what. The poor Limburger! And he's going to split fair. Did he think I'd sit down an' take his twen'y-eighty? No, sir. As a woman the idea revolts me. I was brought up in a strict fifty-fifty school!"

Gordon was himself again.

"Now I warn you this matter has gone as far as it is going," he said impressively. "There are fifty thousand dollars in The Study safe, and I've no doubt in my mind that that is his objective, though how he came to know this——"

"Fifty thousand!" she breathed. "That explains everything! You told me in one of your heart-to-heart talks that you always kept a thousand pounds, but not——"

"This money was drawn to pay an American," said Gordon impatiently. "There is no reason why I should explain why it is here. It is in the safe—that is sufficient."

Heloise had become very thoughtful.

"Then he knew!" she said. "The piker!

Wouldn't that make you sore! Fifty thousand dollars—ten thousand pounds—seven hundred thousand francs—every mark in the world—and all to be cleaned up on his lonesome!"

She was apparently oblivious of Gordon's presence. The immensity of Dan's treachery was all-absorbing.

"So that's why he wanted to work alone! 'Get him to Ostend,' he said, 'and leave the rest to me!' And the rest was fifty thousand dollars! That fellow couldn't go straight if he was fired from a gun. Not a word to me either—he expected to get a thousand pounds, he said—it is the most unprofessional thing I've ever heard about in my life!"

"My dear woman," said Gordon testily, "the ethics of the case do not interest me——"

"But he's gonna split this two ways," said Heloise grimly, "or my name is Johanna Dub. He's going to act honest even if it hurts him. Yes, sir. There's going to be honour amongst Double Dan and Heloise Chowster. Shame on you, Dan, you great big yegg!"

The perfidy of the man had changed her whole outlook on life. Her very ideals were tottering.

"He'll split it no-ways, understand that!"

Gordon was firm. "I will not see myself robbed. Do you think I'm a fool?"

She searched his face for rebutting evidence.

"Why, that idea certainly did occur to me," she said mildly; and then her tone changed. Diana's step was on the stair. "I won't plead with you any more, Dan, there's nothin' to be gained. I —I wish you luck! Won't you take my hand for the last time?"

Bewildered, Gordon stared at her, then he saw Diana and understood.

"Don't let us part this way, Dan. I forgive you everything you've done. Good-bye, Dan, old friend."

She put out her hand timidly. Gordon could have smacked her.

"Good-bye!"

"You brute—take her hand at once!" hissed Diana.

He took it limply.

"All right—good-evening."

Diana knew that the criminal classes were callous, but she had never realised how brutal they could be.

"Come with me, my dear," she said. "You need not see him any more."

"Thank you," said Gordon; "that's the first kind thing you've said."

Diana treated him with the scorn he deserved.

"Miss Ford"—Heloise was looking wistfully at her benefactress—"dare I ask you sump'n?"

"Why, surely."

Heloise touched her skirt disparagingly.

"Somehow these clothes don't seem right in my state of mind. I know you'll think I'm crazy, but clothes mean an awful lot, even to a woman like me, and these are kind of too gay for a broken-hearted girl. If you've got sump'n quiet and sorrowful——"

Diana smiled. How well she understood!

"I know just how you're feeling. Come to my room, Heloise. You need have no fear. I will send Superbus to look after this—this man."

Gordon thrust out a warning finger.

"Diana, I beg of you not to help this wretched female. And for heaven's sake don't give her any of your new clothes—if you do, she'll impersonate you——"

Diana's glance would have withered a water-lily.

"You despicable brute! Go to your bed and sleep—if you can!"

CHAPTER XXIV

It was Monday morning. A church clock striking one reminded Gordon of this interesting fact. An hour had passed since Bobbie's "good-night" had come to him through the closed door of his room.

"Good-night," said Gordon.

"I wasn't speaking to you," snapped Bobbie.

He had been out all the evening interviewing Inspector Carslake, and the excursion had not been altogether profitable. Bobbie's door closed. He heard the click of Diana's lock being fastened. Dempsi passed, after rhapsodizing at the closed portals of Diana's bower. From somewhere below came the snores of Julius Superbus.

Every exit from the house was closed, save one. The little casement in the big windows of The Study. Gordon had made a careful examination, for there was a possibility that Diana had taken the precaution of screwing it tight. But this she had neglected, satisfied probably with the presence in The Study of Mr. Superbus.

Twice Gordon had tiptoed to the door of his room and turned the handle. It was unlocked to-night. With Bobbie in the house Diana had relaxed her vigilance. Half-past-one chimed. Gordon got off the bed, put on his soiled collar and his coat and gathered up his shoes. He was penniless, but the servants at the hotel knew him, and he would be able to write a cheque on the hotel note-paper and get all the cash he wanted. And then he would return and deal with Mr. Dempsi. He had not yet decided as to the method of Dempsi's death, but it would be painful. As for Heloise . . . he hoped that she would be gone.

Extinguishing the light, he opened the door and listened. There was no sound, and, creeping down the stairs, he passed silently into The Study. Mr. Superbus was breathing regularly —the window rattled a little; the floor vibrated; but no other ill effects followed. As Gordon stood listening, the detective grunted and turned over on his side. The snores ceased—Julius was in a deeper sleep than ever. Now was his chance; yet he had not taken a step before he halted. A circle of light had appeared at the window. He waited, holding his breath. There was a rasp-

ing sound, and the casement opened. He saw the dark bulk of a figure wriggle through. A long pause, in which the newcomer was invisible, then the circle of light appeared again. This time on the safe.

A burglar! His first impulse was to leap at the man and grapple with him. His second was to approach with less commotion. . . .

"Hands up, or I'll fire!"

At the first sibilant of the words, the light went out, and then:

"Don't shoot, guv'nor. It's a cop!"

"Don't shout, you fool!" hissed Gordon. "There's a man sleeping in the room—where's your gun?"

"Don't carry a gun."

"What are you doing here?"

The unknown burglar's impatient click of lips was certainly called for.

"Don't ask silly questions—I said it was a cop, didn't I?"

Gordon groped for the flash-lamp and turned it full on the man's face.

"I know you," he said immediately.

The thin lips parted in a grin.

"You 'ave the advantage of me," he said with mordant humour.

"You are the man who was cleaning the windows yesterday morning?"

The burglar nodded.

"Got me first time. Stark's my name—I'm not giving any trouble, and if you tell the judge I had a gun you're a liar."

He raised his voice a little. Gordon glanced round fearfully, but the detective was snoring again.

"Ssh! Not so loud. Have you opened the safe?"

The idea came to him at that second: a brain flash of singular brilliance.

"I should have done if you'd been a minute later," said Stark plaintively. "You've spoilt a good night's work."

Gordon nodded.

"Open it," he said, and Stark could not believe his ears.

"What!"

"Open it. I'll pay you well—and I'll give you your liberty. You'll only have to work on one lock—the combination is 'Telma'—got that?"

"Do you mean it, guv'nor?" incredulity dominant.

"Yes, yes. I lost my key," replied Gordon. "Now get to work—can you manage without the lights?"

The other grinned in the darkness.

"Sure. Only amatchoors want a lot of light. A flash is best—and brightest."

He produced from under his coat a short jemmy and a longer and thinner instrument. He may have been, and was, a poor window-cleaner. As burglar he belonged to the aristocracy.

"Ever seen a safe opened before?" he asked over his shoulder.

Gordon shook his head.

"No—not this way," he admitted.

"Takes years to learn and there's not much money in it," said Mr. Stark sadly. "Spoilt by foreigners this trade is, ruined by competition and outsiders, like everything else. Americans mostly. Why they don't keep in their own country I don't know. Very smart fellows—I'll say that, though they're taking the bread out of our mouths; but we've got as good men if they only had a bit of encouragement and capital behind 'em."

The door swung out.

"There you are, sir!"

Gordon peered over the man's shoulder.

"Open?" he asked, in a tone which combined surprise and annoyance. The man who sold him the safe was indeed a teller of untrue stories.

"Yes."

"Show the light. Here it is. Moses! there's not ten thousand there!"

He grasped what there was, and raised his head to listen—somebody was coming down the stairs.

"Now go quick—there's somebody coming. Here, take this!"

He thrust a bill into the burglar's hand. In a second Stark was through the window. Gordon was following, when a quivering voice from the sofa called:

"Who's there——?"

Mr. Selsbury did not wait to explain. As the detective, with surprising courage, ran toward him, Gordon jumped from the window.

"Stop!"

It was another voice—Dempsi! Gordon dropped to the courtyard as the other fired.

"Bang—bang!"

Twice he shot, and there was a scream of pain. Diana heard it, and sprang from bed. Drawing her wrap about her as she ran, she flew down the stairs and into The Study. In the centre of the room stood Dempsi, and at his feet a figure —the wriggling figure of Julius Superbus.

"He has paid the price of duty," said Dempsi.

And so it proved. Ten little toes had Mr. Superbus brought to 61 Cheynel Gardens. One would never go forth again attached to his patrician feet.

CHAPTER XXV

SUMMING up the matter, as she did in a night made busy with the comings and goings of doctors, and vocal with the low-voiced agony of Mr. Superbus, Diana was glad that the man had escaped. She was sorry, extremely sorry about the Julian toe—a small toe by all accounts, and not especially valuable or wholly necessary to his complete enjoyment of life—still, it was his, and had been (as he explained between paroxysms) a close companion throughout his chequered life. He recounted stories about it, half fond, half wistful. Once he had dropped a hammer on it and had cursed it for being in the way. He regretted that now. It had been a gentle, easy-going toe, and had never given him trouble. Other toes had developed callosities that were painful; but this child of his heart amongst the pedal appendages had never given him a moment's unease.

Yes, she was rather sorry, even though the doctor said he was in no pain and (not knowing the fearless character of the man) had given an

opinion that Julius was more frightened than hurt. But she was glad Double Dan had gone . . . ever so glad.

And the shooting had produced one most desirable result—Dempsi had been completely subdued ever since. Not once had he described her as his angel or his serene vision. He who had searched the heavens and starry spaces thereof for illustrations of her beauty, her charm and her numerous attractions, was satisfied with the most commonplace terminology.

"The fact is," said Bobbie, "the poor Wop has never used an automatic before, and the darn thing went off before he realised he had touched the trigger."

"Poor Wop!" Diana's nose went up. "Poor Mr. Superbus rather!"

This was so long after breakfast that Bobbie had had time to make a call at Diana's bank, and Mr. Dempsi was a notable absentee.

"How did you sleep?" he asked sympathetically.

"Terribly! Bobbie, did you get the money?"

"Yes, by great good luck your credits came through on Saturday. I have the money. The manager was full of apologies on behalf of self and bank. Here it is." He produced from his

hip pocket a thick wad of bills. "In American money. By some strange accident it is clean."

She was thoughtful, biting her lip.

"I had a wire from Gordon. He has reached Inverness," she mentioned.

"I'm sure he has," said Bobbie drily. "And how is the old K Bus?"

"Poor old fellow!" she laughed quietly. "I think he's almost reconciled to his very great loss. I shouldn't be surprised if he didn't develop into a war-hero, but for the moment he's worrying what his good lady will say about the lost toe. From what he says I gather that she counts them every night."

Bobbie grinned at the fire. There seemed something inexpressibly comic about a man losing a toe.

"Nothing has been heard of Double Dan?" he asked, and she shook her head.

"No, he seems to have disappeared. We know by the marks on the brickwork that he climbed the wall, and according to Mr. Superbus, he had a companion. In one way I'm glad he's gone."

Bobbie looked at the girl in astonishment.

"Glad?" he said. "Good lord, why?"

"For the poor girl's sake." Diana's face was

saddened. "You don't know what she's suffered at his hands, Bobbie. There's a whole lot of good in Heloise. Of course she feels his going. That's the curse of it—a woman never loses hope."

"He must have got away pretty quickly," said Bobbie. "I was down immediately after Dempsi, and though I searched the house and the courtyard at once, there was no sign of the devil."

She made a little gesture of distaste.

"Don't let us talk about him," she said briefly and went on to talk of Dempsi.

"He has been simply splendid. Really I have had a pleasant shock: the only one of that variety he has ever given me. I shouldn't have thought that a man of his excitable temperament could have taken the matter so calmly. But he is subdued. A little nervous, I think, about the shooting. He was very anxious to know if I had informed the police, but of course I hadn't—so far as Mr. Superbus' toe was concerned. He's going to-day."

"Not Dempsi?"

She nodded.

"He says he'll wait for me for a thousand years," she sighed. "I told him a hundred would

be long enough—heigho! He hasn't spoken otherwise about marriage all the morning. I almost like him for it."

The subject of conversation strolled into the room a few minutes later. He was looking haggard, Bobbie thought, and remarkably unattractive.

"Good morning, Mr. Selsbury—you have not seen Aunt Lizzie? I wished to condole with her. It is terrible when lovers are parted—but how terrible for you! Double Dan, you say? It makes my flesh creep. Yet"—his admiring eyes beamed upon his hostess—"yet our little Diana did not fear! Ah, that was most wonderful. But tell me—who is Aunt Lizzie?"

"A friend of mine," said Diana shortly.

Dempsi shook his head in sorrow.

"I shall never forgive myself for shooting Superbus—in the toe," he said in a tone of bitter regret.

Bobbie laughed.

"You sound as though you'd like to have shot him through the head," he said, and Mr. Dempsi recoiled before the bloodthirsty suggestion.

"I? Heaven forbid! I admire Superbus. He is to me most admirable."

"He shouldn't have slept," said Diana. "He promised me that if he did fall off, he would have one eye open. Those were his words. I don't know how he would manage, but he was so confident that I didn't come down to look."

She ran to the door. The tap, tap of a stick on the parquet floor of the hall announced the coming of the invalid, his right foot a picturesque cushion of white bandages. There was a crutch under one arm, and he heaved himself forward in jerks. To Diana he accorded a wan smile. Bobbie took one arm, Mr. Dempsi the other. They reached the sofa to the accompaniment of many grunts and "ughs."

"You are feeling better, Mr. Superbus?"

He shook his head, being unwilling at this early stage to dispense with the anxiety, the care and the apprehension that was his due.

"Middling, ma'am, middling. Naturally, I'm a little bit shook up. I always get that way when I figure in a shooting affray—if I may use the term—and I've been in a few in my time. I'll tell you about them one day, miss. But this, in a way, is the worst, and I admit I don't feel up to the mark. What my good lady will say when she finds I've lost a toe——"

He shook his head mournfully. Diana tried to cheer him.

"I'm sure she won't make a fuss, Mr. Superbus. Women are very brave in such moments of trial. And a toe more or less isn't essential to married happiness."

Mr. Superbus wasn't so sure, being at that moment in his most sentimental mood. His eyes were moist.

"It's a dreadful thing to think, ma'am," he said, his lip a-tremble, "that only yesterday that little toe of mine was alive and well; to-day—where is it?"

Mr. Dempsi covered his eyes with his long, thin hand.

"And I did it," he said, his bosom heaving.

"Don't take on so, sir"—Julius had the air of a Christian martyr excusing the lions. "Why, it might have happened to any gentleman. I wish you'd shot him—or her."

Diana's eyes narrowed.

"Or her?" she repeated. "What makes you say that?" Was the other person a woman?"

"It might have been." Julius was not prepared to be more explicit. In truth, he wasn't particularly sure himself, but being gifted by nature

with the mystery novelist's successful trick of passing on suspicion to the most unlikely quarters, he suggested a woman accomplice, if only to be the only person in the room who knew the truth. Which was that the second person was a man and used expressions that no lady could possibly employ.

"Whether it is one or the other I am unable to make a statement at present," he said sombrely. "That will come out at the trial."

"What really happened?" Bobbie put the question. He had still only a disjoined idea of what had occurred in the dark.

Julius fumbled in his pocket and found a massive notebook, opened it deliberately, and, after much searching, found the page he sought.

"At two A. M. on or about the fifteenth inst.," he said sonorously and with complete relish, "I was aroused from my slumbers by an uneasy apprehension that trouble was abroad, viz: burglars or other bad characters. I proceeded at once to rise from my bed, which was twenty-five feet six inches from the window (I got Aunt Lizzie to measure it)" he explained in parenthesis. "The Study was in darkness, but I saw the figure of a man. As I darted forward to arrest him,

there arose, seemingly from my feet, a person or persons unknown. Realising that danger threatened, I immediately grappled with them—I suppose you heard the sign of a struggle?" he asked anxiously.

Diana had heard nothing. Bobbie shook his head.

"I didn't, but I wasn't near enough," he explained.

Mr. Dempsi, his hand behind him, his bearded chin on his waistcoat, did not look up.

"Suddenly," resumed Superbus, "there was a shot and I knew no more."

"But you say it might have been a woman?" Diana was not inclined to lose sight of that point.

"It might have been a man or a woman," said Julius. "That will come out when I tell the secret story, so to speak. For the present I will describe it as a person or persons unknown. I don't mind admitting," he added, "that they was strangers to me, and I never want to see 'em again. Where's Uncle Isaac? I haven't seen him this morning."

"But when you grappled, Mr. Superbus, you surely knew whether it was a man or a woman?" insisted Diana.

Julius inclined his head.

"Speaking as a married man," he said discreetly, "I ought to know."

"But you 'grappled'?"

"In a sense," said Mr. Superbus, "only in a sense. When a man grapples with—with—a problem, does he catch it by the ear, or punch it under the jaw? No, ma'am. When I say grappled, I'm speaking in a general way."

"But you saw——"

Here Julius was on safer ground.

"Well, it looked like a man . . . I'll tell you the truth, it looked like Uncle Isaac. Don't imagine for one second that it *was* Uncle Isaac," he warned them. "I cast no aspersions. He got through the door before I could properly see him."

"You must have been mistaken, Mr. Superbus," said Diana.

"I saw it slip past me and out of that door." Julius pointed.

"You were mistaken," said Diana. "The man went out of the window and from the window into the courtyard. And then over the wall. The window was found open."

But Julius was really not interested in the

escaping criminal. On the other hand, he was very much interested in his own emotions. For once he felt that the eyes of the world were on him.

"As I lay there," he said, "the whole of my life flitted before me. I saw my old school and the schoolmaster waiting for me at the door with his cane behind his back. I saw the public-house what I used to use as a young man, and where I met my good lady, owing to taking her father home one night and helping the family to put him to bed——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Bobbie, a little unkindly, "it must have been a dreadful experience. Now tell us how you came to be asleep whilst these people were breaking open the safe?"

Mr. Superbus raised his eyebrows and shut his eyes.

"Drugs," he said. "The coffee must have been drugged last night. I'm a light sleeper. The slightest noise and I'm awake!"

Bobbie nodded.

"Oh, you *did* hear the pistol then?" he said.

Diana thought his remark somewhat offensive.

CHAPTER XXVI

WITH the remark that he had to go to his good lady or his good lady would have to come to him, Julius had taken his departure in a motor ambulance. He could as well have gone by taxi, but he expressed a preference for an ambulance. "One with a red cross," he suggested. Diana had 'phoned a garage, and Julius Superbus made his exit dramatically, covered with blankets, flat on a stretcher, and smiling the smile of one who was not long for this world but wasn't afraid to go.

"And what my missus will say when I come home short, I shudder to think," he said pathetically. "I don't know: the only satisfaction I've got is that it was done on dooty."

This significantly. When he had gone, Diana asked:

"What is a toe worth, Bobbie? I must send the poor dear something. Would two hundred pounds be too little?"

"It was a little toe," said Bobbie thoughtfully; "a big toe would have cost you more. Try him with two hundred."

Diana wrote at once.

She felt in excellent humour despite the empty safe with its hanging door; despite the shadow of tragedy which had impinged upon the house. Eleanor and the cook had made an early return. She had told them to stay away until Tuesday. They had argued (so they said) as to whether she had said Monday or Tuesday, and, to be on the safe side, had returned on the earlier day. Cook's triumph (she had supported the Tuesday view) was tempered by the chagrin of a lost twenty-four hours of well-paid idleness.

Heloise, from an upper window, saw the detective take his ceremonious departure. She had reason to be glad that Dempsi's shots had done no greater mischief. She had been noticeably nervous all that morning, starting at every sound. Once Diana had found her hiding—there was no other word for it—in the little book-room and, detected, she had been so frightened and confused that Diana for a second was puzzled, till she remembered that the abrupt departure of Double Dan must have shocked the poor girl beyond understanding.

Diana had finished her letter when Heloise came aimlessly into the room and looked round.

Dempsi was sitting on the sofa, his face in his hands, looking moodily into the fire. Bobbie was in his own room, engaged in some mysterious business of his own (he was writing frantic telegrams to Gordon, imploring him to return; these he addressed to every hotel in Paris where he was likely to be found).

Diana looked up with a smile, blotted the envelope and fixed a stamp.

"You must talk with Aunt—with Helosie—and amuse her," she said.

"Huh?" Dempsi broke off his meditations with a start.

"You have met Heloise?"

So many unlikely things had happened in the past forty-eight hours that it was quite possible she had omitted an introduction. She would not have been surprised if Dempsi denied having ever met Aunt Lizzie.

"Oh yes, we have met," he said awkwardly. "Did the shot waken you? I owe you ten thousand apologies if it did."

She shook her head sadly.

"No, no. My mind was too full of—something else. Something that I cannot explain. Uncle—Uncle Isaac has really gone?"

Diana nodded.

"Gone! Out of my life! It doesn't seem possible."

Dempsi was vaguely interested, fixing her with a blank look; he also was thinking of something else.

"Dear lady, you seem very sad," he said mildly.

Her tragic eyes moved till they rested on his.

"Sad! When I think of my old home and my dear father in Michigan——"

"I thought you said Connecticut," interrupted Diana.

Heloise was a quick thinker.

"Mother lives there," she said gently. "Poppa is in Michigan. They're living apart."

"I see," said Diana helpfully, "happily separated. Most of one's friends are. It is so convenient for everybody—it simply means if you keep on good terms with both, that you double the number of your friends. You must feel rather nice about returning to America—having two homes that will welcome you."

Heloise looked hard at the girl. She was never quite sure whether she was being very serious or

very sarcastic. Other people disliked Diana for the same reason.

"So you're going home?" Dempsi roused himself to take a benevolent interest in Aunt Lizzie.

"Yes, I'm going back to a new life, thanks to Miss Ford," she said quietly. "Some day this life will seem like a bad dream; I shall forget everything, except those who have robbed me of that which was dearer than life itself."

The embarrassed Diana made her escape.

"You go to America?"

"Yes."

"It is a beautiful country. A wonderful country!" mused Dempsi.

The click of the door as Diana disappeared brought him to his feet, and his expression had undergone a remarkable change. He looked down at Heloise keenly, as he rasped:

"Now, where is that money?"

Heloise glanced at the door, looked over her shoulder: the room was empty.

"You know where it is, Sally!" he said harshly. "Now come across!"

She was not sad any more; on the contrary, she was on the verge of fury. Hands on hips, she faced him.

"Say, Dan, you're the cleverest thing in male impersonators I know," she said shrilly. "I guess I wouldn't be surprised to see you come into this room disguised as a performing flea. But the innocent child is outside your repertoire. You wouldn't last three bars as Little Eva. Who took the money? You cheap skate! You're not going to put that over on me! You took the money. You took it, and helped that poor fool make a getaway at the same time. I guess you were working on the safe when he came in."

"You lie!" He was beside himself with wrath. "I came in after you'd got it out. I didn't mean to shoot—I guess that was the maddest thing I ever did. But I saw this guy getting through the window, and I guessed what happened. He gave you the money to let him escape!"

She showed her white teeth in a grimace of fury.

"You mean I've got it right now? In my pocket?"

"Sure I mean that," he said doggedly.

She heaved up a long, impatient sigh.

"You're going to hear from my husband's lawyers! That's what! And right here and now

I'm telling you sump'n, you four-flushin' dog! You took the money, and shot that poor boob when he came in to see who it was breaking the tin! What were you doing in the room all dressed up ready to jump the first train out of London—and leave me flat? You sneak! Haven't I worked hard for you? Haven't I sat for hours making an exhibition of my darned ego for that soul-lizard? Didn't I get out of him the story of Diana, and give you the script and band parts and light cues? Didn't I pump him till there was noth'n' left but the squeak and the handle? And—do—you—dare—to turn me down?"

He dared nothing. Her victory was complete when he began to make excuses.

"There was fifty thousand dollars in that safe. All I've got is a crossed cheque that's as useful as confetti at a funeral. It will take two days to clear: Selsbury will be back to-night."

"Fifty thousand dollars!" she sneered. "You told me nothing about that. Maybe you forgot it? You said there wasn't a thousand pounds in the job. Didn't you? You said you'd be glad if you got back expenses. Am I lying? And what's that cheque anyway? Money she owed Dempsi? Great snakes—the money Dempsi

threw at her! I told you that, and I'd forgotten it!"

She ran her fingers through her hair. Her smile was fixed and terrifying. The smile of the Medusas was jocund by comparison.

"I forgot about it until I got a note from her enclosing the money," he protested. "Why, when that cheque came along, you could have blown me down. It was then I saw big money in the proposition and decided to go after the rest of the stuff. It looked easy to me."

Impolite scepticism showed in her eye, and his injured air only intensified her suspicions.

"Now, Dan, you're a wonderful teller of tales and I guess if I were a bit younger I'd fall for it!" she said practically. "But you're going to be a good little boy and 'fess up to Auntie that you took that money, and then you'll say 'Auntie, we'll split it fifty-fifty.' And if you don't, Dan, why, it's 'Good morning, judge' for yours!"

He tried blandishment.

"Honest, now, Sally, you've got it," he said genially. "Let's get right down to cases and——"

"Would I be here doing this act and allowing my emotions to destroy my beauty if I had it?

Shouldn't I be stepping on it? Would you be exchanging persiflage with anything but the dust of my trail?"

This point appeared logical.

"That's true," he said. "Then who opened the safe—not Selsbury?"

"You did," she nodded, and he went purple.

"Curse you! I told you I didn't take it . . ."

The door handle turned. Without looking round they knew it was Diana. She had omitted to enclose a cheque in her letter, she remarked at large, but they were too absorbed in their talk to heed her.

"I just love the country," sighed Heloise. "To hear the old blue jays singing and watch the clouds coming up over the hill and feel the breeze in your face—why, there's nothing quite like it, Mr. Dempsi."

"I've never seen you two talking before," said Diana with a smile. Which was true.

In a few seconds she was gone. . . .

"Now see here, Sally, we haven't time to act foolishly over this business. The stuff was taken, maybe by that guy Selsbury. What did you come here for, anyway?" It was a question that he had been seeking an opportunity to ask.

"I came here when I found you were trying to work the job as a one-man performance. I know you, Dan; you've got a mighty bad reputation amongst honest crooks."

He laughed without merriment.

"I'm trying to live it down. Where has he gone—did he tell you he was leaving?"

"No; we'd given up confidences before he left. You said he would come back. I've got it in my bones that you're right. I guess he got it."

"But he couldn't have worked a job like this single-handed," said the other. "Why, your husband couldn't have opened that safe more scientifically. . . ."

She was not willing to be turned by gross flattery.

"Cut out the small talk and get right down to the grand facts of life," she said briskly. "Did I find Selsbury and affinitize him or did I not? Did I . . ."

He snarled at her like an angry mongrel.

" 'Did I, didn't I'—great Moses! Do I want all that stuff? Why did you allow him to come back here?"

"Let him come back?" she said scornfully. "I made him come back! When I got him into the

house, I had him like that. I knew how you'd turn up. I knew there was money here, and I was going to stay with it. It's a funny thing about me that, of all the affinities I've met, noth'n' is quite so close as money. Noth'n' understands me better or talks more like Governor George Demosthenes."

The man was finished. He too was a philosopher.

"Well, there's no help for it," he said with a groan that he could not suppress. "We'll have to share. The old terms, mind—none of your fifty-fifty stuff. Seventy-thirty."

"Seventy-thirty! Well, I admire cold blood! It's fifty-fifty or nothing with me, Dan. But there ain't anything to share."

Here he corrected her.

"She's paying up. I've given her back the cheque. If you wait half-an-hour she'll have it cashed. Now are you satisfied? Sixty-forty?"

"Fifty-fifty!" said Heloise firmly. "You'd never forgive yourself if you gave me less."

They wrangled for ten minutes; in the end Heloise gained a victory for principle.

CHAPTER XXVII

ELEANOR came furtively in search of her mistress and found her in Gordon's room, valiantly overhauling his wardrobe.

"The clergyman, miss," she said, with an air of mystery that was natural.

The well-trained servant has an air appropriate to the calling of every visitor. Dread and a funereal solemnity for doctors, a primness for elderly ladies, a suppressed blitheness to announce the young, mystery for the clergy; only a lawyer baffles interpretation. The secret dispositions of lawyers have never been probed.

"The clergyman!" Diana's heart fell.

"A priest, ma'am, by his clothes," said Eleanor.

She was a Primitive Methodist and was secretly thrilled by priests and nuns.

Not before had Diana considered Mr. Dempsi's sectarian leanings. Nor had she before had sufficient confidence to meet the man whom she guessed had been sent by Dempsi to arrange the details of her servitude.

"I will come down," she said, and took the card from Eleanor's hand.

She read the few printed words carefully, then she read them again and passed her hand over her eyes.

"Father Guiseppi Dempsi, Vicar of Banhurst."

"Father Guiseppi Dempsi!" she said aloud, and in another second was flying down the stairs.

She recognised him instantly, clean-shaven, dark, the old grin in his brown eyes. She would have known him even had he not been wearing his black cassock.

"Diana!" he said. "After all these years!"

"Mr. Dempsi," she grasped, gripping the thin hand outstretched, "it *is* you! You don't know how glad I am to see you!"

Dempsi, the real Dempsi! Then who was the other? The solution of the mystery came to her in a flash, and in the realisation the whole weight of the universe was lifted from her heart.

"Father Dempsi!" she said, in a wondering way, still holding his hand. "It doesn't seem possible!"

"I was rather a fool, wasn't I?" he said without any trace of embarrassment. "Yes, I went into the Church. But I should have let you know."

"The money!" she said, suddenly. "The money you gave me—you will want that?"

He laughed a little sheepishly.

"I wondered if any was left. Honestly, I need money just now. My boys' club is insolvent and the new church hall wants an organ . . ."

She nodded. She was still bewildered. Almost hysterical. And then came an excited Bobbie with a rush, flinging open the door.

"Diana!" he began.

Behind him stood Gordon. A somewhat severely clad Gordon, yet different. She ran to him—before she realised what happened, she had kissed him. Gordon returned the kiss without any visible effort.

"Gordon, do you know the Reverend Guiseppi Dempsi? You've heard me talk about Mr. Dempsi?"

Gordon stared at the priest open-mouthed.

"The Reverend Guiseppi Dempsi?" he said. "I thought—er——" He grasped the hand of

the smiling clergyman. "I knew it couldn't be that little . . . how do you do?"

"Diana and I are very old acquaintances—old friends, I ought to say," said Dempsi, beaming from one to the other. "Old lovers, I nearly said, but the love was a little one-sided." He chuckled.

"Extraordinary!" Gordon could say no more.

"But, Gordon, how is it you're back? I had a wire this morning from Inverness. You couldn't have got back——"

"By aeroplane," said Gordon without a blush. "I had a feeling that all was not well with you."

"Gordon, did you really?" Her colour came and went. "You are psychic, aren't you? And Gordon, dear, you've had your whiskers shaved!"

He nodded gravely.

"I meant to tell you I intended doing that—you once said that you did not like them. No more than that was necessary. They vanished in the twinkling of an eye."

It was Gordon's moment. He was colossal.

Eleanor opened the front door to a gentleman who was difficult to place.

"Miss Ford at home?"

"Yes, sir, but she's engaged."

The stranger had no visiting-card apparently, for he announced himself.

"I am Inspector Carslake from Scotland Yard," he said. "I should like to see the safe that was opened last night. It isn't necessary to disturb Miss Ford."

Eleanor, in a flutter, opened the door wider and showed him into The Study.

". . . leave by the first train," Mr. Dempsi was saying. "We'll split later."

"We'll split before we part," said Heloise firmly, "for fear an accident happens—to the money."

The other shrugged.

"I'd hate to have a mind like yours," he said.

And then the visitor came in. Heloise recognised him before he saw her face. There was a newspaper within reach, and she snatched it up, disappeared behind the printed page, and, reading, walked slowly from The Study into the little library.

"Don't go," said Dempsi.

Then he too saw the detective, and here the recognition was mutual.

"The cobwebs on your chin are strangers to

me," said Carslake, "but that noble brow and those sparkling eyes belong to an old friend of mine, Dan Throgood, yclept Double Dan."

"I'm afraid you've made a mistake," said "Dempsi" with some hauteur.

"What you're afraid of is that I haven't," said Carslake, and glanced at the broken door of the safe. "Your work?"

"No. That's not my line. You've nothing on me, Carslake. I've been staying here as a guest of Mr. Selsbury."

"And now you're going to be a guest of the King," said Carslake, slipping a pair of handcuffs from his pocket. "I must say, Dan, that you see life!"

It was later in the day, and from information received, that the inspector called at 61 Cheynel Gardens to arrest and detain one Sarah Chowster, British subject *alias* Heloise van Oynne. But Heloise had gone. None knew whither.

"Can I see Miss Ford," he asked, "or Mr. Selsbury?"

Eleanor asked him to wait, and, passing into The Study, listened intently at the door.

". . . I really was going back to Australia, Gordon."

"I'll follow you, and if necessary lose myself in the bush," said Gordon's voice.

There was a long silence. Eleanor opened the door an inch and looked. Then she went back to the detective.

"Mr. Selsbury and Miss Ford are engaged," she said.

THE END

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